THE ARM-CHAIR AT THE INN

· F · HOPKINSON · SMITH ·

Charlotte A. Whitridge
Pasadena
Cal.

May 1915.

THE ARM-CHAIR AT THE INN

BOOKS BY F. HOPKINSON SMITH
PUBLISHED BY CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

The Arm-Chair at the Inn. Illustrated *net*	$1.30
Kennedy Square, Illustrated	1.50
Peter. Illustrated	1.50
The Tides of Barnegat. Illustrated . . .	1.50
The Fortunes of Oliver Horn. Illustrated	1.50
The Romance of an Old-Fashioned Gentleman. Illustrated	1.50
Colonel Carter's Christmas. Illustrated .	1.50
Forty Minutes Late. Illustrated	1.50
The Wood Fire in No. 3. Illustrated . . .	1.50
The Veiled Lady. Illustrated	1.50
At Close Range. Illustrated	1.50
The Under Dog. Illustrated	1.50

Mignon

THE ARM-CHAIR AT THE INN

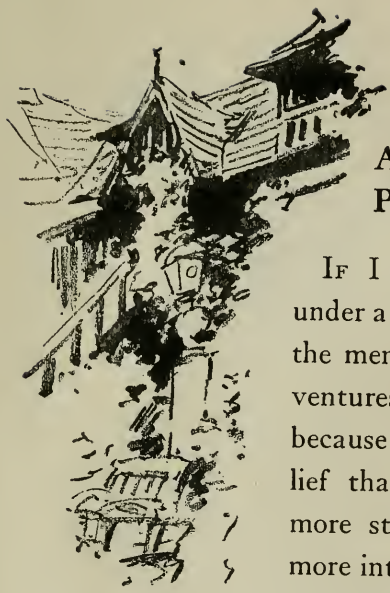
BY

F. HOPKINSON SMITH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
A. I. KELLER, HERBERT WARD
AND THE AUTHOR

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1912

Published August, 1912

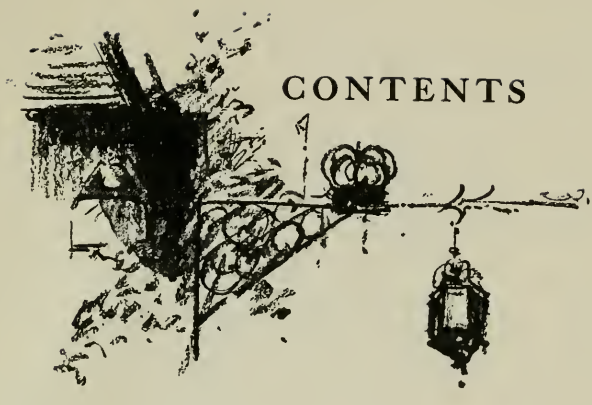


AUTHOR'S PREFACE

If I have dared to veil under a thin disguise some of the men whose talk and adventures fill these pages it is because of my profound belief that truth is infinitely more strange and infinitely more interesting than fiction. The characters around the table are all my personal friends; the incidents, each and every one, absolutely true, and the setting of the Marmouset, as well as the Inn itself, has been known to many hundreds of my readers, who have enjoyed for years the rare hospitality of its quaint and accomplished landlord.

F. H. S.

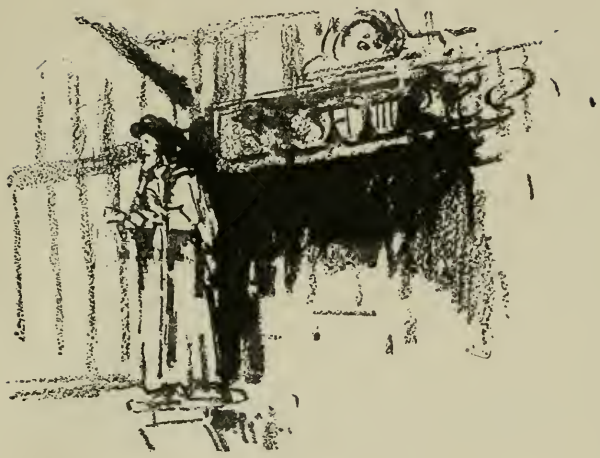
November, 1911



CONTENTS

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS



THE ARM-CHAIR AT THE INN

THE ARM-CHAIR AT THE INN

I

THE MARMOUSET

"HOW many did you say?" inquired Lemois, our landlord.

"Five for dinner, and perhaps one more. I will know when the train gets in. Have the fires started in the bedrooms and please tell Mignon and old Leà to put on their white caps."

We were in the Marmouset at the moment —the most enchanting of all the rooms in this most enchanting of all Normandy inns. Lemois was busying himself about the table, selecting his best linen and china—an old Venetian altar cloth and some Nancy ware—replacing the candles in the hanging chandelier, and sorting the silver and glass. Every one of my expected guests was personally known to him; some of them for years. All had shared his hospitality, and each and every one appreciated its rare value. Nothing was too good for them, and nothing should be left undone which would add to their comfort.

I had just helped him light the first blaze in the big baronial fireplace, an occupation I revel in, for to me the kindling of a fire is the gathering of half a dozen friends together, each log nudging his neighbor, the cheer of good comradeship warming them all. And a roaring fire it was when I had piled high the logs, swept the hearth, and made it ready for the choice spirits who were to share it with me. For years we have had our outings—or rather our "in-tings" before it—red-letter days for us in which the swish of a petticoat is never heard, and we are free to enjoy a "man's time" together; red-letter days, too, in the calendar of the Inn, when even Lemois, tired out with the whirl of the season, takes on a new lease of life.

His annual rejuvenation began at dawn today, when he disappeared in the direction of the market and returned an hour later with his procession of baskets filled with fish and lobsters fresh out of the sea a mile away (caught at daylight), some capons, a string of pigeons, and an armful of vegetables snatched in the nick of time from the early grave of an impending frost.

As for the more important items, the Chablis Moutonne and Roumanée Conti—rare Burgundies—they were still asleep in their cob-

webs on a low Spanish bench that had once served as a temporary resting-place outside a cardinal's door.

Until to-night Lemois and I have dined in the kitchen. You would too could you see it. Not by any manner of means the sort of an interior the name suggests, but one all shining brass, rare pottery, copper braziers, and resplendent pewter, reflecting the dancing blaze of a huge open hearth with a spit turned by the weight of a cannon ball fired by the British, and on which—the spit, not the ball—are roasted the joints, chickens, and game for which the Inn is famous, Pierre, the sole remaining chef—there are three in the season—ineffectually cudgelling his French pate under his short-cropped, shoe-brush hair for some dish better than the last.

Because, however, of the immediate gathering of the clan, I have abandoned the kitchen and have shifted my quarters to the Marmouset. Over it up a steep, twisted staircase with a dangling rope for banisters is my bedroom, the Chambre de Cure, next to the Chambre de Officier—where the gluttonous king tossed on his royal bed (a true story, I am told, with all the details set forth in the State Archives of

France). Mine has a high-poster with a half lambrequin, or bed curtain, that being all Lemois could find, and he being too honest an antiquary to piece it out with modern calico or chintz. My guests, of course, will take their pick of the adjoining rooms—Madame Sévigné's, Grèvin's, the Chambre du Roi, and the others—and may thank their stars that it is not a month back. Then, even if they had written ten days ahead, they would have been received with a shrug—one of Lemois' most engaging shrugs tinged with grief—at his inability to provide better accommodation for their comfort, under which one could have seen a slight trace of suppressed glee at the prosperity of the season. They would then doubtless have been presented with a massive key unlocking the door of a box of a bedroom over the cake-shop, or above the apothecary's, or next to the man who mends furniture—all in the village of Dives itself.

And now a word about the Inn itself—even before I tell you of the Arm-Chair or the man who sat in it or the others of the clan who listened and talked back.

Not the low-pitched, smothered-in-ivy Kings

Arms you knew on the Thames, with its swinging sign, horse-block, and the rest of it; nor the queer sixteenth-century tavern in that Dutch town on the Maas, with its high wainscoting, leaded window-panes, and porcelain stove set out with pewter flagons—not that kind of an inn at all.

This one bolsters up one corner of a quaint little town in Normandy; is faced by walls of sombre gray stone loop-holed with slits of windows, topped by a row of dormers, with here and there a chimney, and covers an area as large as a city block, the only break in its monotony being an arched gate-way in which swing a pair of big iron-bound doors. These are always open, giving the passer-by a glimpse of the court within.

You will be disappointed, of course, when you drive up to it on a summer's day. You will think it some public building supported by the State—a hospital or orphan asylum—and, tourist-like, will search for the legend deep cut in the key-stone of the archway to reassure yourself of its identity. Nobody can blame you—hundreds have made that same mistake, I among them.

But don't lose heart—keep on through the

gate, take a dozen steps into the court-yard and look about, and if you have any red corpuscles left in your veins you will get a thrill that will take your breath away. Spread out before you lies a flower-choked yard flanked about on three sides by a chain of moss-encrusted, red-tiled, seesaw roofs, all out of plumb. Below, snug under the eaves, runs a long go-as-you-please corridor, dodging into a dozen or more bedrooms. Below this again, as if tired out with the weight, staggers a basement from which peer out windows of stained glass protected by Spanish grills of polished iron, their leaded panes blinking in the sunshine, while in and out, up the door-jambs, over the lintels, along the rain-spouts, even to the top of the ridge-poles of the wavy, red-tiled roofs, thousands of blossoms and tangled vines are running riot.

And this is not all. Close beside you stands a fuchsia-covered, shingle-hooded, Norman well, and a little way off a quaint kiosk roofed with flowering plants, and near by a great lichen-covered bust of Louis VI, to say nothing of dozens of white chairs and settees grouped against a background of flaring reds and brilliant greens. And then, with a gasp of joy, you follow the daring flight of a giant feather-blown

clematis in a clear leap from the ground, its topmost tendrils throttling the dormers.

Even then your surprises are not over. You have yet to come in touch with the real spirit of the Inn, and be introduced to our jewel of a dining-room, the "Marmouset," opening flat to the ground and hidden behind a carved oaken door mounted in hammered iron: a low-ceilinged, Venetian-beamed room, with priceless furniture, tapestries, and fittings—chairs, tables, wainscoting of carved oak surmounted by Spanish leather; quaint andirons, mirrors, arms, cabinets, silver, glass, and china; all of them genuine and most of them rare, for Lemois, our landlord, has searched the Continent from end to end.

Yes!—a great inn this inn of William the Conqueror at Dives, and unique the world over. You will be ready now to believe all its legends and traditions, and you can quite understand why half the noted men of Europe have, at one time or another, been housed within its hospitable walls, including such exalted personages as Louis XI and Henry IV—the latter being the particular potentate who was laid low with a royal colic from a too free indulgence in the seductive oyster—not to men-

tion such rare spirits as Molière, Dumas, George Sand, Daubigny, as well as most of the litterateurs, painters, and sculptors of France, including the immortal Grèvin, many of whose drawings decorate the walls of one of the garden kiosks, and whose apartment still bears his name.

And not only savants and men of rank and letters, but the frivolous world of to-day—the flotsam and jetsam of Trouville, Houlgate, and Cabourg—have gathered here in the afternoon for tea in the court-yard, their motors crowding the garage, and at night in the Marmouset when, under the soft glow of overhead candles falling on bare shoulders and ravishing toilettes, laughter and merry-making extend far into the small hours. At night, too, out in the gardens, what whisperings and love-makings in the soft, starry air!—what seductive laughter and little half-smothered screams! And then the long silences with only the light of telltale cigarettes to mark their hiding-places!

All summer this goes on until one fine morning the most knowing, or the most restless, or the poorest of these gay birds of passage (the Inn is not a benevolent institution) spreads its wings and the flight begins. The next day the

court is empty, as are all the roosting-places up and down the shore. Then everybody at the Inn takes a long breath—the first they have had for weeks.

About this time, too, the crisp autumn air, fresh from the sea, begins to blow, dulling the hunger for the open. The mad whirl of blossoms no longer intoxicates. Even the geraniums, which have flamed their bravest all summer, lose their snap and freshness; while the blue and pink hydrangeas hang their heads, tired out with nodding to so many passers-by: they, too, are paying the price; you can see it in their faces. Only the sturdy chrysanthemums are rejoicing in the first frost, while the more daring of the roses are unbuckling their petals ready to fight their way through the perils of an October bloom.

It is just at this blessed moment that I move in and settle down with my companions, for now that the rush is over, and the little Normandy maids and the older peasant women who have served the hungry and thirsty mob all summer, as well as two of the three French cooks, have gone back to their homes, we have Leà, Mignon, and Pierre all to ourselves.

I put dear old Leà first because it might as

well be said at once that without her loving care life at the Inn, with all its comforts, would be no life at all—none worth living. Louis, the running-water painter, known as the Man in High-Water Boots—one of the best beloved of our group—always insists that in the days gone by Leà occupied a pedestal at the main entrance of the twelfth-century church at the end of the street, and is out for a holiday. In proof he points out the empty pedestal set in a niche, and has even gone so far as to pencil her name on the rough stone.

Mignon, however, he admits, is a saint of another kind—a dainty, modest, captivating little maid, who looks at you with her wondering blue eyes, and who is as shy as a frightened gazelle. There is a young fisherman named Gaston, a weather-tanned, frank, fearless fellow who knows all about these eyes. He brings the fish to the Inn—those he catches himself—and Mignon generally manages to help in their unpacking. It is not a part of her duty. Her special business is to make everybody happy; to crack the great white sugar-loaf into bits with a pair of pincers—no machine-made dominoes for Lemois—and to turn the coffee-roaster—an old-fashioned,

sheet-iron drum swinging above a brazier of hot coals—and to cool its contents by tossing them in a pan—much as an Egyptian girl winnows wheat. It is a pity you never tasted her coffee, served in the garden—old Leà on the run with it boiling-hot to your table. You might better have stopped what you were doing and taken steamer for Havre and the Inn. You would never have regretted it.

Nor would you even at this late hour regret any one of the dishes made by Pierre, the chef. And now I think of it, it is but fair to tell you that if you repent the delay and show a fit appreciation of his efforts, or come properly endorsed (I'll give you a letter), he may, perhaps, invite you into his kitchen which I have just vacated, a place of such various enticing smells from things baking, broiling, and frying; with unforgettable, appetizing whiffs of burnt sugar, garlic, fine herbs, and sherry, to say nothing of the flavors of bowls of mayonnaise, heaps of chopped onions, platters of cream—even a basket of eggs still warm from the nest—that the memory of it will linger with you for the rest of your days.

Best of all at this season, we have quite to ourselves that prince of major-domos, our land-

lord, Lemois. For as this inn is no ordinary inn, this banquet room no ordinary room, and this kitchen no ordinary kitchen, so, too, is Monsieur Lemois no ordinary landlord. A small, gray, gently moving, low-voiced man with thoughtful, contented face, past the prime of life; a passionate lover of animals, flowers, and all beautiful things; quick of temper, but over in a moment; a poet withal, yet a man with so quaint a humor and of so odd a taste, and so completely absorbed in his pets, cuisine, garden, and collection, that it is easy to believe that when he is missed from his carnal body, he will be found wandering as a ghost among these very flower-beds or looking down from the walls of the Marmouset—doubtless an old haunt of his prior to this his latest incarnation. Only here would he be really happy, and only here, perhaps, among his treasures, would he be fully understood.

One of the rarest of these—a superb Florentine chair—the most important chair he owns, stood within reach of my hand as I sat listening to him before the crackling blaze.

"Unquestionably of the sixteenth century!" he exclaimed with his customary enthusiasm, as I admired it anew, for, although I had heard

most of it many times, I am always glad to listen, so quaint are his descriptions of everything he owns, and so sincerely does he believe in the personalities and lineage of each individual piece.

"I found it," he continued, "in a little chapel in Ravenna. For years it had stood outside the cabinet of Alessandro, one of the Florentine dukes. Think of all the men and women who have sat in it, and of all the cruel and anxious thoughts that raced through their brains while they waited for an audience with the tyrant! Nothing like a chair for stirring up old memories and traditions. And do you see the carved heads on the top! I assure you they are alive! I have caught them smiling or frowning too often at the talk around my table not to know. Once when De Bouf, the great French clown was here, the head next you came near splitting itself in two over his grimaces, and when Marcot told one of his pathetic stories that other one wept such tears that I had to mop them up to keep the velvet from being spoilt. You don't believe it?—you laugh! Ah!—that is just like you modern writers—you do not believe anything—you have no imagination! You must measure things with a rule! You must

have them drawn on the blackboard! It is because you do not see them as they are. You shut your eyes and ears to the real things of life; it is because you cannot understand that it is the *soul* of the chair that laughs and weeps. Monsieur Herbert will not think it funny. He understands these queer heads—and, let me tell you, they understand *him*. I have often caught them nodding and winking at each other when he says something that pleases them. He has himself seen things much more remarkable. That is the reason why he is the only one of all who enters this room worthy to sit in it."

"You like Herbert, then?" I interrupted, knowing just what he would say.

"How absurd, my dear friend! You like a filet, and a gown on a woman—but you don't like a man. You *love* him—when he is a *man!* —and Monsieur Herbert is all that. It is the English in him which counts. Since he was fourteen years of age he has been roaming around the world doing everything a man could to make his bread—and he a gentleman born, with his father's house to go home to if he pleased. Yet he has been farm-hand, acrobat, hostler, sailor before the mast, newspaper reporter, next four years in Africa among

the natives; then painter, and now, at forty-five, after only six years' practice, one of the great sculptors of France, with his work in the Luxembourg and the ribbon of the Legion in his button-hole! Have I not the right to say that he is a *man?* And one thing more: not for one moment has he ever lost the good heart and the fine manner of the gentleman. Ah! that is most extraordinary of all, when you think of the adventures and hair-breadth escapes and sufferings he has gone through! Did he ever tell you of his stealing a ride in Australia on a locomotive tender to get to Sydney, two hundred miles away?"

I shook my head.

"Well—get him to tell you. You will be so sorry for him, even now, that you cannot keep the tears from your eyes. Listen! There goes the scream of his horn—and I wager you, too, that he brings that delightful wild man, Monsieur Louis, with him."

II

THE WOOD FIRE AND ITS FRIENDS

TWO men burst in.

Herbert, compact, wellknit, ruddy, simple in his bearing and manner; Louis, broad-shouldered, strong as a bull, and bubbling over with unrepressed merriment. Both were muffled to their chins—Herbert in his fur motor-coat, his cap drawn close over his steady gray eyes; Louis in his big sketching-cloak and hood and a pair of goggles which gave him so owlish a look that both Mignon and Leà broke out laughing at the sight.

"Fifty miles an hour, High-Muck" (I am High-Muck) "this brute of a Herbert kept up. Everything went by in a blur; but for these gig-lamps I'd be stone blind."

The brace and the snap of the crisp autumn air clinging to their clothes suddenly permeated the room as with electricity. Even slow-moving Lemois felt its vivifying current as he hurriedly dragged the Florentine nearer the fire.

"See, Monsieur Herbert, the chair has been

waiting for you. I have kept even Monsieur High-Muck out of it."

"That's very good of you, Lemois," returned the sculptor as he handed Leà his coat and gloves and settled himself in its depths. "I'm glad to get back to it. What the chair thinks about it is another thing—make it tell you some time."

"But it has—only last night one of the heads was saying——"

"None of that, Lemois," laughed Louis, abreast of the fireplace now, his fingers outspread to the blaze. "Too many wooden heads talking around here as it is. I don't, of course, object to Herbert's wobbling around in its upholstered magnificence, but he can't play doge and monopolize everything. Shove your high-backed pulpit with its grinning cherubs to one side, I tell you, Herbert, and let me warm up" —and off came the cloak and goggles, his broad shoulders and massive arms coming into view. Then tossing them to Mignon, he turned to me.

"There's one thing you're good for, High-Muck-a-Muck, if nothing else, and that is to keep a fire going. If I wanted to find you, and there was a chimney within a mile, I'd be sure you were sitting in front of the hearth with

the tongs in your hand"—here he kicked a big log into place bringing to life a swarm of sparks that blazed out a welcome and then went laughing up the chimney. "By thunder!—isn't this glorious! Crowd up, all of you—this is the best yet! Lemois, won't you please shove just a plain, little chair this way for me? No—come to think of it, I'll take half of Herbert's royal throne," and he squeezed in beside the sculptor, one leg dangling over the arm of the Florentine.

Herbert packed himself the closer and the talk ran on: the races at Cabourg and Trouville; the big flight of wild geese which had come a month earlier than usual, and last, the season which had just closed with the rush of fashion and folly, in which chatter Lemois had joined.

"And the same old crowd, of course, Lemois?" suggested Herbert; "and always doing the same things—coffee at nine, breakfast at twelve, tea at five, dinner at eight, and bridge till midnight! Extraordinary, isn't it! I'd rather pound oakum in a country jail."

"Some of them will," remarked Louis with a ruminating smile. "And it was a good season, you say, Lemois?" he continued; "lots of

people shedding shekels and lots of tips for dear old Leà? That's the best part of it. And did they really order good things—the beggars?—or had you cleaned them out of their last franc on their first visit? Come now—how many Pêche-Flambées, for instance, have you served, Lemois, to the mob since July—and how many demoiselles de Cherbourg—those lovely little girl lobsters without claws?"

"Do you mean the on-shore species—those you find in the hotels at Trouville?" returned Lemois, rubbing his hands together, his thoughtful face alight with humor. "We have two varieties, you know, Monsieur Louis—the on-shore—the Trouville kind who always bring their claws with them—you can feel them under their kid gloves."

"Oh, let up!—let up!" retorted Louis. "I mean the kind we devour; not the kind who devour us."

"Same thing," remarked Herbert in his low, even tones from the depths of the chair, as he stretched a benumbed hand toward the fire. "It generally ends in a broil, whether it's a woman or a lobster."

Louis twisted his body and caught the sculptor by the lapel of his coat.

"None of your cheap wit, Herbert! Marc, the lunatic, would have said that and thought it funny—you can't afford to. Move up, I tell you, you bloated mud-dauber, and give me more room; you'd spread yourself over two chairs with four heads on their corners if you could fill them."

Whereupon there followed one of those good-natured rough-and-tumble dog-plays which the two had kept up through their whole friendship. Indeed, a wrestling match started it. Herbert, then known to the world as an explorer and writer, was studying at Julien's at the time. Louis, who was also a pupil, was off in Holland painting. Their fellow students, noting Herbert's compact physique, had bided the hour until the two men should meet, and it was when the room looked as if a cyclone had struck it—with Herbert on top one moment and Louis the next—that the friendship began. The big-hearted Louis, too, was the first to recognize his comrade's genius as a sculptor. Herbert had a wad of clay sent home from which he modelled an elephant. This was finally tossed into a corner. There it lay a shapeless mass until his conscience smote him and the whole was transformed into a Congo

boy. Louis insisted it should be sent to the Salon, and thus the explorer, writer, and painter became the sculptor. And so the friendship grew and strengthened with the years. Since then both men had won their gold medals at the Salon—Louis two and Herbert two.

The same old dog-play was now going on before the cheery fire, Louis scrouging and pushing, Herbert extending his muscles and standing pat—either of them could have held the other clear of the floor at arm's length—Herbert, all his sinews in place, ready for any move of his antagonist; Louis, a Hercules in build, breathing health and strength at every pore.

Suddenly the tussle in the chair ceased and the young painter, wrenching himself loose, sprang to his feet.

"By thunder!" he cried, "I forgot all about it! Have you heard the news? Hats off and dead silence while I tell it! Lemois, stop that confounded racket with your dishes and listen! Let me present you to His Royal Highness, Monsieur Herbert, the Gold Medallist—his second!" and he made a low salaam to the sculptor stretched out in the Florentine. He was never so happy as when extolling Herbert's achievements.

"Oh, I know all about it!" laughed back Lemois. "Le Blanc was here before breakfast the next morning with the *Figaro*. It was your African—am I not right, Monsieur Herbert?—the big black man with the dagger—the one I saw in the clay? Fine!—no dryads, no satyrs nor demons—just the ego of the savage. And why should you not have won the medal?" he added in serious tones that commanded instant attention. "Who among our sculptors—men who make the clay obey them—know the savage as you do? And to think, too, of your being here after your triumph, under the roof of my Marmouset. Do you know that its patron saint is another African explorer—the first man who ever set foot on its western shores—none other than the great Bethencourt himself? He was either from Picardy or Normandy—the record is not clear—and on one of his voyages—this, remember, was in the fifteenth century, the same period in which the stone chimney over your heads was built—he captured and brought home with him some little black dwarfs who became very fashionable. You see them often later on in the prints and paintings of the time, following behind the balloon petticoats and high headdresses of the great ladies. After a time

they became a regular article of trade, these marmots, and there is still a street in Paris called 'The Marmouset.' So popular were they that Charles VI is said to have had a ministry composed of five of these little rascals. So, when you first showed me your clay sketch of your African, I said—'Ah! here is the spirit of Bethencourt! This Monsieur Herbert is Norman, not English; he has brought the savage of old to light, the same savage that Bethencourt saw—the savage that lived and fought and died before our cultivated moderns vulgarized him.' That was a glorious thing to do, messieurs, if you will think about it"—and he looked around the circle, his eyes sparkling, his small body alive with enthusiasm.

Herbert extended his palms in protest, muttering something about parts of the statue not satisfying him and its being pretty bad in spots, if Lemois did but know it, thanking him at the same time for comparing him to so great a man as Bethencourt; but his undaunted admirer kept on without a pause, his voice quivering with pride: "The primitive man demanding of civilization his right to live! Ah! that is a new motive in art, my friends!"

"Hear him go on!" cried Louis, settling

himself again on the arm of Herbert's chair; "talks like a critic. Gentlemen, the distinguished Monsieur Lemois will now address you on——"

Lemois turned and bowed profoundly.

"Better than a critic, Monsieur Louis. They only see the outside of things. Pray don't rob Monsieur Herbert of his just rights or try to lean on him; take a whole chair to yourself and keep still a moment. You are like your running water—you——"

"Not a bit like it," broke in Herbert, glad to turn the talk away from himself. "His water sometimes reflects—he never does."

"Ah!—but he does reflect," protested Lemois with a comical shrug; "but it is always upsidedown. When you stand upsidedown your money is apt to run out of your pockets; when you think upsidedown your brains run out in the same way."

"But what would you have me do, Lemois?" expostulated Louis, regaining his feet that he might the better parry the thrust. "Get out into your garden and mount a pedestal?"

"Not at this season, you dear Monsieur Louis; it is too cold. Oh!—never would I be willing to shock any of my beautiful statues in

that way. You would look very ugly on a pedestal; your shoulders are too big and your arms are like a blacksmith's, and then you would smash all my flowers getting up. No—I would have you do nothing and be nothing but your delightful and charming self. This room of mine, the 'Little Dwarf,' is built for laughter, and you have plenty of it. And now, gentlemen"—he was the landlord once more—both elbows uptilted in a shrug, his shoulders level with his ears—"at what time shall we serve dinner?"

"Not until Brierley comes," I interposed after we were through laughing at Louis' discomfiture. "He is due now—the Wigwag train from Pont du Sable ought to be in any minute."

"Is Marc coming with him?" asked Herbert, pushing his chair back from the crackling blaze.

"No—Marc can't get here until late. He's fallen in love for the hundredth time. Some countess or duchess, I understand—he is staying at her château, or was. Not far from here, so he told Le Blanc."

"Was walking past her garden gate," broke in Louis, "squinting at her flowers, no doubt, when she asked him in to tea—or is it another Fontainebleau affair?"

"That's one love affair of Marc's I never heard of," remarked Herbert, with one of his meaning smiles, which always remind me of the lambent light flashed by a glowworm, irradiating but never creasing the surface as they play over his features.

"Well, that wasn't Marc's fault—you *would* have heard of it had he been around. He talked of nothing else. The idiot left Paris one morning, put ten francs in his pocket—about all he had—and went over to Fontainebleau for the day. Posted up at that railroad station was a notice, signed by a woman, describing a lost dog. Later on Marc came across a piece of rope with the dog on one end and a boy on the other. An hour later he presented himself at madame's villa, the dog at his heels. There was a cry of joy as her arms clasped the prodigal. Then came a deluge of thanks. The gratitude of the poor lady so overcame Marc that he spent every sou he had in his clothes for flowers, sent them to her with his compliments and walked back to Paris, and for a month after every franc he scraped together went the same way. He never called—never wrote her any letters—just kept on sending flowers; never getting any thanks either, for he never gave

her his address. Oh, he's a Cap and Bells when there's a woman around!"

A shout outside sent every man to his feet; the door was flung back and a setter dog bounded in followed by the laughing face of a man who looked twenty-five of his forty years. He was clad in a leather shooting-jacket and leggings, spattered to his hips with mud, and carried a double-barrelled breech-loading gun. Howls of derision welcomed him.

"Oh!—what a spectacle!" cried Louis. "Don't let Brierley sit down, High-Muck, until he's scrubbed! Go and scrape yourself, you ruffian—you are the worst looking dog of the two."

The Man from the Latin Quarter, as he is often called, clutched his gun like a club, made a mock movement as if to brain the speaker, then rested it tenderly and with the greatest care against one corner of the fireplace.

"Sorry, High-Muck, but I couldn't help it. I'd have missed your dinner if I had gone back to my bungalow for clothes. I've been out on the marsh since sunup and got cut off by the tide. Down with you, Peter! Let him thaw out a little, Herbert; he's worked like a beaver all day, and all we got were three plover

and a becassine. I left them with Pierre as I came in. Didn't see a duck—haven't seen one for a week. Wait until I get rid of this," and he stripped off his outer jacket and flung it at Louis, who caught it with one hand and, picking up the tongs, held the garment from him until he had deposited it in the far corner of the room.

"Haven't had hold of you, Herbert, since the gold medal," the hunter resumed. "Shake!" and the two pressed each other's hands. "I thought 'The Savage' would win—ripping stuff up and down the back, and the muscles of the legs, and he stands well. I think it's your high-water mark—thought so when I saw it in the clay. By Jove!—I'm glad to get here! The wind has hauled to the eastward and it's getting colder every minute."

"Cold, are you, old man!" condoled Louis. "Why don't you look out for your fire, High-Muck? Little Brierley's half frozen, he says. Hold on!—stay where you are; I'll put on another log. Of course, you're half frozen! When I went by your marsh a little while ago the gulls were flying close inshore as if they were hunting for a stove. Not a fisherman fool enough to dig bait as far as I could see."

Howls of derision welcomed him

Brierley nodded assent, loosened his under coat of corduroy, searched in an inside pocket for a pipe, and drew his chair nearer, his knees to the blaze.

"I don't blame them," he shivered; "mighty sensible bait-diggers. The only two fools on the beach were Peter and I; we've been on a sand spit for five hours in a hole I dug at daylight, and it was all we could do to keep each other warm—wasn't it, old boy?" (Peter, coiled up at his feet, cocked an ear in confirmation.) "Where's Marc, Le Blanc, and the others—upstairs?"

"Not yet," replied Herbert. "Marc expects to turn up, so he wired High-Muck, but I'll believe it when he gets here. Another case of Romeo and Juliet, so Louis says. Le Blanc promises to turn up after dinner. Louis, you are nearest—get a fresh glass and move that decanter this way,—Brierley is as cold as a frog."

"No—stay where you are, Louis," cried the hunter. "I'll wait until I get something to eat —hot soup is what I want, not cognac. I say, High-Muck, when are we going to have dinner? I'm concave from my chin to my waistband; haven't had a crumb since I tumbled out of bed this morning in the pitch dark."

"Expect it every minute. Here comes Leà now with the soup and Mignon with hot plates."

Louis caught sight of the two women, backed himself against the jamb of the fireplace, and opened wide his arms.

"Make way, gentlemen!" he cried. "Behold the lost saint—our Lady of the Sabots!—and the adorable Mademoiselle Mignon! I kiss the tips of your fingers, mademoiselle. And now tell me where that fisher-boy is—that handsome young fellow Gaston I heard about when I was last here. What have you done with him? Has he drowned himself because you wouldn't be called in church, or is he saving up his sous to put a new straw thatch on his mother's house so there will be room for two more?"

Pretty Mignon blushed scarlet and kept straight on to the serving-table without daring to answer—Gaston was a tender subject to her, almost as tender as Mignon was to Gaston—but Leà, after depositing the tureen at the top of the table, made a little bob of a curtsy, first to Herbert and then to Louis and Brierley—thanking them for coming, and adding, in her quaint Normandy French, that

she would have gone home a month since had not the master told her of our coming.

"And have broken our hearts, you lovely old gargoyle!" laughed Louis. "Don't you dare leave the Inn. They are getting on very well at the church without you. Come, Herbert, down with you in the old Florentine. I'll sit next so I can keep all three wooden heads in order," and he wheeled the chair into place.

"Now, Leà—the soup!"

III

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO A CERTAIN COLONY OF PENGUINS

LEMOIS, as was his custom, came in with the coffee. He serves it himself, and always with the same little ceremony, which, while apparently unimportant, marks that indefinable, mysterious line which he and his ancestry—innkeepers before him—have invariably maintained between those who wait and those who are waited upon. First, a small spider-legged mahogany table is wheeled up between the circle and the fire, on which Leà places a silver coffee-pot of Mignon's best; then some tiny cups and saucers, and a sugar-dish of odd design—they said it belonged to Marie Antoinette—is laid beside them. Thereupon Lemois gravely seats himself and the rite begins, he talking all the time—one of us and yet aloof—much as would a neighbor across a fence who makes himself agreeable but who has not been given the run of your house.

To the group's delight, however, he was as

much a part of the coterie as if he had taken the fifth chair, left vacant for the always late Marc, who had not yet put in an appearance, and a place we would have insisted upon his occupying, despite his intended isolation, but for a certain look in the calm eyes and a certain dignity of manner which forbade any such encroachments on his reserve.

To-night he was especially welcome. Thanks to his watchful care we had dined well—Pierre having outdone himself in a pigeon pie—and that quiet, restful contentment which follows a good dinner, beside a warm fire and under the glow of slow-burning candles, had taken possession of us.

"A wonderful pie, Lemois—a sublime, never-to-be-forgotten pie!" exclaimed Louis, voicing our sentiments. "Every one of those pigeons went straight to heaven when they died."

"Ah!—it pleased you then, Monsieur Louis? I will tell Pierre—he will be so happy."

"Pleased!" persisted the enthusiastic painter. "Why, I can think of no better end—no higher ambition—for a well-brought-up pigeon than being served hot in one of Pierre's pies. Tell him so for me—I am speaking as a pigeon, of course."

"What do you think the pigeon himself would have said to Pierre before his neck was wrung?" asked Herbert, leaning back in his big chair. "Thank you—only one lump, Lemois."

"By Jove!—why didn't I ask the bird?—it might have been illuminating—and I speak a little pigeon-English, you know. Doubtless he would have told me he preferred being riddled with shot at a match and crawling away under a hedge to die, to being treated as a common criminal—the neck-twisting part, I mean. Why do you want to know, Herbert?"

"Oh, nothing; only I sometimes think—if you will forgive me for being serious—that there is another side to the whole question; though I must also send my thanks to Pierre for the pie."

That one of their old good-natured passages at arms was coming became instantly apparent—tilts that every one enjoyed, for Herbert talked as he modelled—never any fumbling about for a word; never any uncertainty nor vagueness—always a direct and convincing sureness of either opinion or facts, and always the exact and precise truth. He would no sooner have exaggerated a statement than he would have added a hair's-breadth of clay to a

muscle. Louis, on the other hand, talked as he painted—with the same breeze and verve and the same wholesome cheer and sanity which have made both himself and his brush so beloved. When Herbert, therefore, took up the cudgels for the cooked pigeon, none of us were surprised to hear the hilarious painter break out with:

"Stop talking such infernal rot, Herbert, and move the matches this way. How could there be another side? What do you suppose beef and mutton were put into the world for except to feed the higher animal, man?"

"But *is* man higher?" returned Herbert quietly, in his low, incisive voice, passing Louis the box. "I know I'm the last fellow in the world, with my record as a hunter—and I'm sometimes ashamed of it—to advance any such theory, but as I grow older I see things in a different light, and the animal's point of view is one of them."

"Pity you didn't come to that conclusion before you plastered your studio with the skins of the poor devils you murdered," he chuckled, winking at Lemois.

"That was because I didn't know any better—or, rather, because I didn't *think* any bet-

ter," retorted Herbert. "When we are young, we delude ourselves with all sorts of fallacies, saying that things have always been as they are since the day of Nimrod; but isn't it about time to let our sympathies have wider play, and to look at the brute's side of the question? Take a captive polar bear, for instance. It must seem to him to be the height of injustice to be hunted down like a man-eating tiger, sold into slavery, and condemned to live in a steel cage and in a climate that murders by slow suffocation. The poor fellow never injured anybody; has always lived out of everybody's way; preyed on nothing that robbed any man of a meal, and was as nearly harmless, unless attacked, as any beast of his size the world over. I know a case in point, and often go to see him. He didn't tell me his story—his keeper did—though he might have done so had I understood bear-talk as well as Louis understands pigeon-English," and a challenging smile played over the speaker's face.

"You ought to have stepped inside and passed the time of day with him. They wouldn't have fed him on anything but raw sculptor for a month."

Herbert fanned his fingers toward Louis in

good-humored protest, and kept on, his voice becoming unusually grave.

"They wanted, it seems, a polar bear at the Zoo, because all zoos have them, and this one must keep up with the procession. It would be inspiring and educating for the little children on Sunday afternoons—and so the thirty pieces of silver were raised. The chase began among the icebergs in a steam-launch. The father and mother in their soft white overcoats—the two baby bears in powder-puff furs—were having a frolic on a cake of floating ice when the strange craft surprised them. The mother bear tucked the babies behind her and pulled herself together to defend them with her life—and did—until she was bowled over by a rifle ball which went crashing through her skull. The father bear fought on as long as he could, dodging the lasso, encouraging the babies to hurry—sweeping them ahead of him into the water, swimming behind, urging them on, until the three reached the next cake. But the churning devil of a steam launch kept after them—two armed men in the bow, one behind with the lariat. Another plunge—only one baby now—a staggering lope along the edge of the floe, the little tot tumbling, scuf-

fling to its feet; crying in terror at being left behind—doing the best it could to keep up. Then only the gaunt, panic-stricken, shambling father bear—slower and slower—the breath almost out of him. Another plunge—a shriek of the siren—a twist of the rudder—the lasso curls in the air, the launch backs water, the line tautens, there is a great swirl of foam broken by lumps of rocking ice, and the dull, heavy crawl back to the ship begins, the bear in tow, his head just above the water. Then the tackle is strapped about his girth, the 'Lively now, my lads!' rings out in the Arctic air, and he is hauled up the side and dumped half dead on deck, his tongue out, his eyes shot with blood.

"You can see him any day at the Zoo—the little children's noses pressed against the iron bars of his cage. They call him 'dear old Teddy bear,' and throw him cakes and candies, which he sniffs at and turns over with his great paw. As for me, I confess that whenever I stand before his cage I always wonder what he thinks of the two-legged beasts who are responsible for it all—his conscience being clear and neither crime, injustice, nor treachery being charged against him. Yes, there are two sides

to this question, although, as Louis has said, it might have been just as well to have thought about it before. Speak up, Lemois, am I right or wrong? You have something on your mind; I see it in your eyes."

"It's more likely on his stomach," interrupted Louis; "the pigeon may have set too heavy."

"You are more than right, Monsieur Herbert," Lemois answered in measured tones, ignoring the painter's aside. He was stirring his cup as he spoke, the light of the fire making a silhouette of his body from where I sat. "For your father bear, as you call him, I have every sympathy; but I do not have to go to the North Pole to express what we owe to animals. I bring the matter to my very door, and I tell you from my heart that if I had my way there would never be anything served in my house which suffered in the killing — not even a pigeon."

Everybody looked up in astonishment, wondering where the joke came in, but our landlord was gravity itself. "In fact," he went on, "I believe the day will come when nothing will be killed for food—not even your dear demoiselle de Cherbourg, Monsieur Louis. Adam and

Eve got on very well without cutlets or broiled squab, and yet we must admit they raised a goodly race. I, myself, look forward to the time when nothing but vegetables and fruit, with cheese, milk, and eggs, will be eaten by men and women of refinement. When that time comes the butcher will go as entirely out of fashion as has the witch-burner and, in many parts of the world, the hangman."

"But what are you going to do with Brierley, who can't enjoy his morning coffee until he has bagged half a dozen ducks on his beloved marsh?" cried Louis, tossing the stump of his cigar into the fire.

"But Monsieur Brierley is half converted already, my dear Monsieur Louis; he told me the last time I was at his bungalow that he would never kill another deer. He was before his fireplace under the head of a doe at the time—one he had shot and had stuffed. Am I not right, Monsieur Brierley?" and Lemois inclined his head toward the hunter.

Brierley nodded in assent.

"Same old game," muttered Louis. "Had his fun first."

"I have been a cook all my life," continued the undaunted Lemois, "and half the time

train my own chefs in my kitchen, and yet I say to you that I could feed my whole clientele sumptuously without ever spilling a drop of blood. I live in that way myself as far as I can, and so would you if you had thought about it."

"Skimmed milk and hard-boiled eggs for breakfast, I suppose!" roared Louis in derision, "with a lettuce sandwich and a cold turnip for luncheon."

"No, you upsidedown man! Cheese souffles, omelets in a dozen different ways, stuffed peppers, tomatoes fried, stewed, and fricasseed, oysters, clams——"

"And crabs and lobsters?" added Louis.

"Ah! but crabs and lobsters suffer like any other thing which has the power to move; what I am trying to do is to live so that nothing will suffer because of my appetite."

"And go round looking like a skeleton in a doctor's office! How could you get these up on boiled cabbage?" and he patted Herbert's biceps.

"No, my dear Monsieur Louis," persisted Lemois gravely, still refusing to be side-tracked by the young painter's onslaughts. "If we loved the things we kill for food as Monsieur

Brierley loves his dog Peter, there would never be another Chateaubriand cooked in the world. What would you say if I offered you one of that dear fellow's ribs for breakfast? It would be quite easy—the butcher is only around the corner and Pierre would broil it to a turn. But that would not do for you gourmets. You must have liver or sweetbreads cut from an animal you never saw and of which, of course, you know nothing. If the poor animal had been a playmate of Mignon's—and she once had a pet lamb—you could no sooner cut its throat than you could Peter's."

Before Louis could again explode, Brierley, who, at mention of Peter's name had leaned over to stroke the dog's ears, now broke in, a dry smile on his face.

"There's another side of this question which you fellows don't seem to see, and which interests me a lot. You talk about cruelty to animals, but I tell you that most of the cruelty to-day is served out to the man with the gun. The odds are really against him. The birds down my way have got so almighty cunning that they club together and laugh at us. I hear them many a time when Peter and I are dragging ourselves home empty-handed. They

know too when I start out and when I give up and make for cover."

"Go slow, Brierley; go slow!"

"Of course they know, Louis!" retorted Brierley in mock dejection. "Doesn't a crow keep a watch out for the flock? Can you get near one of them with a gun unless you are lucky enough to shoot the sentry first? You can call it instinct if you choose—I call it reason—the same kind of mental process that compels you to look out for an automobile before you cross the street, with your eyes both ways at once. When you talk of their helplessness and want of common sense, and inability to look out for themselves, you had better lie under a hedge as I have done, the briars scraping your neck, or scrunched down in a duckblind, with your feet in ice water, and study these simple-minded creatures. Explain this if you can. Some years ago, in America, I spent the autumn on the Housatonic River. The ducks come in from Long Island Sound to feed on the shore stuff, and I could sometimes get five—once I got eleven—between dawn and sunrise. The constant banging away soon made them so shy that if I got five in a week I was lucky. On the first of the month and for the first time in

the State a new law came into force making it cost a month's wages for any pot-hunter to kill a duck or even have one in his possession. The law, as is customary, was duly advertised. Not only was it published in the papers but stuck up in bar-rooms and county post-offices, and at last became common gossip around the feeding-ground of the ducks. At first they didn't believe it, for they still kept out of sight, flying high—and few at that. But when they found the law was obeyed and that all firing had ceased, not a gun being heard on the river, they tumbled to the game as quick as did the pot-hunters. When the shooting season opened the following year, hardly a duck showed up. Those that came were evidently stragglers who rested for a day on their long flight south; but the Long Island Sound ducks—the well-posted ducks—stayed away altogether until, with the first of the month, the law for their protection came into force again. Then, so the old farmer, a very truthful man with whom I used to put up, wrote me, they came back by thousands; the shore was black with them."

"And you really believe it, Brierley?" Louis' head was shaking in a commiserating way.

"Of course I believe it, and I can show the

farmer's letter to back it," he answered, with a wink at me behind his hand; "and so would you if you had been humbugged by them as many times as I have. Ask Peter—he'll tell you the same thing. And I'll tell you something else. On the edge of that same village was a jumble of shanties inhabited by a lot of Italians who had come up from New York to work a quarry near by. On Sundays and holidays these fellows went gunning for the small birds, especially cedar birds and flickers, hiding in the big woods a mile away. After these birds had stood it for a while they put their dear little innocent heads together and thought it all out. Women and children did not shoot, therefore the safest place for nesting and skylarking was among these very women and children. After that the woods were empty; the birds just made fools of the pot-hunters and swarmed to the gardens and yards and village trees. No one had ever seen them before in such quantities, and —would you believe it?—they never went back to the woods again until the Italians had left for New York."

Lemois, having also missed the humor in Brierley's tone, rose from his place beside the coffee-table, leaned over the young writer, and,

with a characteristic gesture, patted him on the arm, exclaiming:

"How admirably you have put it, my dear Monsieur Brierley; I have to thank you most sincerely. Ah! you Americans are always clear and to the point. May I add one more word? That which made these birds so cunning was the fact that you were out to *kill* them." Here he straightened up, his back to the fire, and stood with the light of its blaze tingeing his gray beard. "It's a foolish fancy, I know, but I would have liked to have lived, if only for one day, with the man Adam, just to see how he and Madame Eve and the Noah's ark family got on before they began quarrelling and Cain made a hole in the head of the other monsieur. I have an idea that the lion and the lamb ate out of the same trough, with the birds on their backs for company—all the world at peace. My Coco rubs his beak against my cheek, not because I feed him, but because he trusts me; he would, I am sure, bite a piece out of Monsieur Louis' because he does not trust him—and with reason," and the old man smiled good-naturedly. "But why don't they all trust us?"

Herbert, who had also for some reason en-

tirely missed Brierley's humor, fumbled for an instant with the end of a match he had picked from the cloth, and then, tossing it quickly from him as if he had at last framed the sentence he was about to utter, said in a thoughtful tone:

"I have often wondered what the world would be like if all fear of every kind was abolished—of punishment, of bodily hurt, and of pain? Everything that swims, flies, or walks is afraid of something else—women of men, men of each other. The first thing an infant does is to cry out—not from the pain, but from fright—just as a small dog or the cub of a bear hides under its mother's coat before its eyes are open. It is the ogre, Fear, that begins with the milk and ends with the last breath in terror over the unknown, and it is our fault. Half the children in the world—perhaps three-fourths of them—have been brought up by fear and not by love."

"How about the lambasting your father gave you, Herbert, when you hooked it from school? 'Spare the rod and spoil the—' You know the rest of it. Did you deserve it?"

"Probably I did," laughed Herbert. "But, all the same, Louis, that foolish line has done

more harm in the world than any line ever written. Many a brute of a father—not mine, for he did what he thought was right—has found excuse in those half-dozen words for his temper when he beat his boy."

"Oh, come, let us get back to dry ground, gentlemen," broke in Brierley. "We commenced on birds and we've brought up on moral suasion with the help of a birch-rod. Nobody has yet answered my argument: What about the birds and the way they play it on Peter and me?" and again Brierley winked at me.

"It's because you tricked them first, Brierley," returned Herbert in all seriousness and in all sincerity. "They got suspicious and outwitted you, and they will every time. A beast never forgets treachery. I know of a dozen instances to prove it."

"Now I think of it, I know of one case, too," remarked Louis gravely, in the voice of a savant uncovering a matter of great weight; "that is, if I may be allowed to tell it in the presence of the big Nimrod of the Congo—he of a hundred pairs of tusks, to say nothing of skins galore."

Herbert nodded assent and with an air of

surprise leaned forward to listen. That the jovial painter had ever met the savage beast in any part of the world was news to him.

"A most extraordinary and remarkable instance, gentlemen, showing both the acumen, the mental equipment, and the pure cussedness, if I may be permitted the expression, of the brute beast of the field. The incident, as told to me, made a profound impression on my early life, and was largely instrumental in my abandoning the pursuit and destruction of game of that class. I refer to the well-known case of the boy who gave the elephant a quid of tobacco for a cake, and was buried the following year by his relatives when the circus came again to his town—he unfortunately having occupied a front seat. Yes, you are right, the beast forgives anything but treachery. But go on, Professor Herbert; your treatment of this extremely novel view of animal life is most exhilarating. I shall, at the next meeting of the Academy of Sciences, introduce a——"

Brierley's hand set firmly on Louis' mouth, who sputtered out he would be good, would have ended the discussion had not Lemois moved into an empty chair beside Herbert, and, resting his hand on the sculptor's shoulder, ex-

claimed in so absorbed a tone as to command every one's attention:

"Please do not stop, Monsieur Herbert, and please do not mind this wild man, who has two mouths in his face—one with which he eats and the other with which he interrupts. I am very much interested. You were speaking of the ogre, Fear. Please go on. One of the things I want to know is whether it existed in the Garden of Eden. Now if you gentlemen will all keep still"—here he fixed his eyes on Louis—"we may hear something worth listening to."

Louis threw up both hands in submission, begging Lemois not to shoot, and Herbert, having made him swear by all that was holy not to open either of his mouths until his story was told to the end, emptied his glass of Burgundy and faced the expectant group.

"We don't need to go back to the Garden of Eden to decide the question, Lemois. As to who is responsible for the existence of this ogre, Fear, I can answer best by telling you what happened only four years ago on a German expedition to the South Pole. It was told me by the commander himself, who had been specially selected by Emperor William as the best man to take charge. When I met him he was

captain of one of the great North Atlantic liners—a calm, self-contained man of fifty, with a smile that always gave way to a laugh, and a sincerity, courage, and capacity that made you turn over in your berth for another nap no matter how hard it blew.

"We were in his cabin near the bridge at the time, the walls of which were covered with photographs of the Antarctic, most of which he had taken himself, showing huge icebergs, vast stretches of hummock ice, black, clear-etched shore lines, and wastes of snow that swept up to high mountains, their tops lost in the fog. He was the first human being, so he told me, to land on that coast. He had left the ship in the outside pack and with his first mate and one of the scientists had forced a way through the floating floes, their object being to make the ascent of a range of low rolling mountains seen in one of the photographs. This was pure white from base to summit except for a dark shadow one-third the slope, which he knew must be caused by an overhanging ledge with possibly a cave beneath. If any explorers had ever reached this part of the Antarctic, this cave, he knew, would be the place of all others in which to search for records and remains.

"He had hardly gone a dozen yards toward it when his first mate touched his arm and pointed straight ahead. Advancing over the crest of the snow came the strangest procession he had ever seen. Thirty or more penguins of enormous size, half as high as a man, were marching straight toward them in single file, the leader ahead. When within a few feet of them the penguins stopped, bunched themselves together, looked the invaders over, bending their heads in a curious way—walking round and round as if to get a better view—and then waddled back to a ridge a few rods off, where they evidently discussed their strange guests.

"The captain and the first mate, leaving the scientist, walked up among them, patted their heads, caressed their necks—the captain at last slipping his hand under one flipper of the largest penguin, the mate taking the other—the two conducting the bird slowly and with great solemnity and dignity back to the boat, its companions following as a matter of course. None of them exhibited the slightest fear; did not start or crane their heads in suspicion, but were just as friendly as so many tame birds waiting to be fed. The boat seemed to interest them as much as the men had done. One

by one, or by twos and threes, they came waddling gravely down to where it lay, examined it all over and as gravely waddled back, looking up into the explorers' faces as if for some explanation of the meaning and purpose of the strange craft. They had, too, a queer way of extending their necks, rubbing their cheeks softly against the men's furs, as if it felt good to them. The only thing they seemed disappointed in were the ship's rations—these they would not touch.

"Leaving the whole flock grouped about the boat, the party pushed on to the dark shadow up the white slope. It was, as he had supposed, an overhanging cliff, its abrupt edge and slant forming a shallow cave protected from the glaciers and endless snows. As he approached nearer he could make out the whirling flight of birds, and when he reached the edge he found it inhabited by thousands upon thousands of sea fowl—a gray and white species common to these latitudes. But there was no commotion nor excitement of any kind—no screams of alarm or running to cover. On the contrary, when the party came to a halt and looked up at the strange sight, two birds stopped in their flight to perch on the mate's shoulder,

and one hopped toward the captain with a movement as if politely asking his business. He even lifted the young birds from under their mother's wings without protest of any kind—not even a peck of their beaks—one of the older birds really stepped into his hand and settled herself as unconcerned as if his warm palm was exactly the kind of nest she had been waiting for. He could, he told me, have carried the whole family away without protest of any kind so long as he kept them together.

"The following week he again visited the shore. This time he found not only the friendly penguins, who met him with even more than their former welcome, but a huge seal which had sprawled itself out on the rock and whose only acknowledgment of their presence was a lazy lift of the head followed by a sleepy stare. So perfectly undisturbed was he by their coming, that both the captain and the first mate sat down on his back, the mate remaining long enough to light his pipe. Even then the seal moved only far enough to stretch himself, as if saying, 'Try that and you will find it more comfortable.'

"On this visit, however, something occurred

which, he told me, he should never cease to regret as long as he lives. That morning as they pushed off from the ship, one of the dogs had made a clear spring from the deck and had landed in the boat. It was rather difficult to send him back without loss of time, and so he put him in charge of the mate, with orders not to take his eyes off him and, as a further precaution, to chain him to the seat when he went ashore. So fascinated were the penguins by the dog that for some minutes they kept walking round and round him, taking in his every movement. In some way, when the mate was not looking, the dog slipped his chain and disappeared. Whether he had gone back to the vessel or was doing some exploring on his own account nobody knew; anyhow, he must be found.

"It then transpired that one of the penguins had also taken a notion to go on a still hunt of its own, and alone. Whether the dog followed the penguin, or the penguin the dog, he said he never knew; but as soon as both were out of sight the dog pounced upon the bird and strangled it. They found it flat on its back, the black-webbed feet, palms up, as in dumb protest, the plump white body glis-

tening in the snow. From its throat trickled a stream of blood: they had come just in time to save any further mutilation. To hide all traces of the outrage, the captain and his men not only carried the dead penguin and the live dog to the boat, but carefully scraped up every particle of the stained snow, which was also carried to the boat and finally to the ship. What he wanted, he told me, was to save his face with the birds. He knew that not one of them had seen the tragedy, and he was determined that none of them should find it out. So careful was he that no smell of blood would be wafted toward them, that he had the boat brought to windward before he embarked the load; in this way, too, he could avoid bidding both them and the seal good-by.

"The following spring he again landed on the shore. He had completed the survey, and the coast lay on their homeward track. There were doubters in the crew, who had heard the captain's story of the penguins walking arm and arm with him, so he landed some of the ship's company to convince them by ocular demonstration of its truth. But no penguins were in sight, nor did any other living thing put in an appearance. One of his men—there were

six this time—caught a glimpse of a row of heads peering at them over a ridge of snow a long way off, but that was all. When he reached the cave the birds flew out in alarm, screaming and circling as if to protect their young."

Herbert paused, moved his cup nearer the arm of his chair, and for a moment stirred it gently.

Lemois, whose grave eyes had never wandered from Herbert, broke the silence.

"I should have learned their language and have stayed on until they did understand," he murmured softly. "It wouldn't have taken very long."

"The captain did try, Lemois," returned Herbert, "first by signs and gentle approaches, and then by keeping perfectly still, to pacify them; but it was of no use. They had lost all confidence in human kind. The peace of the everlasting ages had come to an end. Fear had entered into their world!"

IV

THE ARRIVAL OF A LADY OF QUALITY

ONE of the delights of dressing by our open windows at this season is to catch the aroma of Mignon's roasting coffee. This morning it is particularly delicious. The dry smell of the soil that gave it birth is fast merging into that marvellous perfume which makes it immortal. The psychological moment is arriving; in common parlance it is just on the "burn"—another turn and the fire will have its revenge. But Mignon's vigil has never ceased—into the air it goes, the soft breeze catching and cooling it, and then there pours out, flooding the garden, the flowers, and the roofs, its new aroma and with it its new life.

And the memories it calls up—this pungent, fragrant, spicy perfume: memories of the cup I drank in that old posada outside the gate of Valencia and the girl who served it, and the matador who stood by the window and scowled; memories of my own toy copper

Flooding the garden, the flowers, and the roofs

coffee-pot, with its tiny blue cup and saucer which Luigi, my gondolier, brings and pours himself; memories of the thimblefuls in shallow china cups hardly bigger than an acorn shell, that Yusef, my dragoman, laid beside my easel in the patio of the Pigeon Mosque in Stamboul, when the priests forbade me to paint.

Yes!—a wonderful aroma this which our pretty, joyous Mignon is scattering broadcast over the court-yard, hastening every man's toilette that he may get down the earlier where Leà is waiting for him with the big cups, the crescents, the pats of freshly churned butter, and the pitcher of milk boiling-hot from Pierre's fire.

Another of the pleasures of the open window is being able to hear what goes on in the court-yard. To-day the ever-spontaneous and delightful Louis, as usual, is monopolizing all the talk, with Lemois and Mignon for audience, he having insisted on the open garden for his early cup, which the good Leà has brought, her scuffling sabots marking a track across the well-raked gravel. The conversation is at long range—Louis sitting immediately under my window and Lemois, within reach of the kitchen

door at the other side of the court, busying himself with his larder spread out on a table.

"Monsieur Lemois! Oh, Monsieur Lemois!" Louis called; "will you be good enough to pay attention! What about eggs?—can I have a couple of soft-boiled?"

"Why, of course you can have eggs! Leà, tell Pierre to——"

"Yes, I know, but will it endanger the life of the chickens inside? After your sermon last night, and Herbert's penguin yarn, I don't intend that any living thing shall suffer because of my appetite—not if I can help it."

Lemois shrugged his shoulders in laughter, and kept on with his work, painting a still-life picture on his table-top—a string of silver onions for high lights and a brace of pheasants with a background of green turnip-tops for darks. To see Lemois spread his marketing thus deliberately on his canvas of a kitchen table is a lesson in color and composition. You get, too, some idea as to why he was able to reproduce in real paint the "Bayeux" tapestry on the walls of the "Gallerie" and arrange the Marmouset as he has done.

My ear next became aware of a certain silence in the direction of the coffee-roaster

which had ceased its rhythm—the coffee is roasted fresh every morning. I glanced out and discovered our Mignon standing erect beside her roaster with flushed cheeks and dancing eyes. Next I caught sight of young Gaston, his bronze, weather-beaten face turned toward the girl, his eyes roaming around the court-yard. In his sunburned hand he clutched a letter. He was evidently inquiring of Mignon as to whom he should give it.

"Who's it for?" shouted Louis, who, as godfather to Mignon's romance, had also been watching the little comedy in delight. "All private correspondence read by the cruel parent! I am the cruel parent—bring it over here! What!—not for me? Oh!—for the High-Muck-a-Muck." The shout now came over his left shoulder. "Here's a letter for you, High-Muck, from Marc, so this piscatorial Romeo announces. Shall I send it up?"

"No—open and read it," I shouted back.

Louis slit the envelope with his thumb-nail and absorbed its contents.

"Well!—I'll be— No, I won't, but Marc ought. What do you think he's been and gone and done, the idiot!"

"Give it up!"

"Invited a friend of his—a young—the Marquise de la Caux—to dine with us to-night. Says she's the real thing and the most wonderful woman he knows. Doesn't that make your hair curl up backward! He's coming down with her in her motor—be here at seven precisely. A marquise! Well!—if that doesn't take the cake! I'll bet she's Marc's latest mash!"

Herbert put his head out of an adjoining window. "What's the matter?"

"Matter! Why that lunatic Marc is going to bring a woman down to dinner—one of those fine things from St. Germain. She's got a château above Buezval. Marc stayed there last night instead of showing up here."

"Very glad of it, why not?" called Herbert, drawing in his head.

Lemois, who had heard the entire outbreak, nodded to himself as if in assent, looked at Gaston for a moment, and, without adding a word of any kind, disappeared in the kitchen. What he thought of it all nobody knew.

There was no doubt as to the seriousness of the impending catastrophe. Marc, in his enthusiasm, had lost all sense of propriety, and was about to introduce among us an element

we had hitherto avoided. Indeed, one of the enticing comforts at the Inn was its entire freedom from petticoat government of any kind. A woman of quality, raised as she had been, would mean dress-coats and white ties for dinner and the restraint that comes with the mingling of the sexes, and we disliked both—that is, when on our outings.

By this time the news had penetrated to the other rooms. producing various comments. Herbert, with his head again out of the window, advanced the opinion that the hospitality of madame la marquise had been so overwhelming, and her beauty and charm so compelling, that Marc's only way out was to introduce her among us. Louis kept his nose in the air. Brierley, from the opposite side of the court, indulged in a running fire of good-natured criticism in which Marc was described as the prize imbecile who needed a keeper. As for me, sitting on the window-sill watching the by-plays going on below—especially Louis, who demanded an immediate answer for Gaston—there was nothing left, of course, but a—"Why certainly, Louis, any friend of Marc's will be most welcome, and say that we dine at seven."

And yet before the day was over—so subtly

does the feminine make its appeal—that despite our assumed disgust, each and every man of us had resolved to do his prettiest to make the distinguished lady's visit a happy one. As a woman of the world she would, of course, overlook the crudities of our toilettes. And then, as we soon reasoned to ourselves, why shouldn't our bachelor reunions be enlivened, at least for once, by a charming woman of twenty-five—Marc never bothered himself with any older—who would bring with her all the perfume, dash, and chic of the upper world and whose toilette in contrast with our own dull clothes would be all the more entrancing? This, now that we thought about it, was really the touch the Marmouset needed.

It was funny to see how everybody set to work without a word to his fellow. Herbert made a special raid through the garden and nipped off the choicest October roses—buds mostly—as befitted our guest. Louis, succumbing to the general expectancy, occupied himself in painting the menus on which Watteau cupids swinging from garlands were most pronounced. Brierley, pretending it was for himself, spent half the morning tuning up the spinet with a bed-key, in case this rarest of

women could sing, or should want any one else to, while Lemois, with that same dry smile which his face always wears when his mind is occupied with something that amuses him, ordered Pierre to begin at once the preparation of his most famous dish, Poulet Vallée d'Auge, spending the rest of the morning in putting a final polish on his entire George III coffee service—something he never did except for persons, as he remarked, of "exceptional quality."

Not to be outdone in courtesy I unhooked the great iron key of the wine-cellar from its nail in Pierre's kitchen, and swinging back the old door on its rusty hinges, drew from among the cobwebs a bottle of Chablis, our heavier Burgundies being, of course, too heating for so dainty a creature. This I carried in my own hands to the Marmouset, preserving its long-time horizontal so as not to arouse a grain of the sediment of years, tucking it at last into a crib of a basket for a short nap, only to be again awakened when my lady's glass was ready.

When the glad hour arrived and we were drawn up to receive her—every man in his best outfit—best he had—with a rosebud in his button-hole—and she emerged from the darkness and stood in the light of the overhead can-

dles—long, lank Marc bowing and scraping at her side, there escaped from each one of us, all but Lemois, a half-smothered groan which sounded like a faint wail.

What we saw was not a paragon of delicate beauty, nor a vision of surpassing loveliness, but a parallelogram stood up on end, fifty or more years of age, one unbroken perpendicular line from her shoulders to her feet—or rather to a brown velvet, close-fitting skirt that reached to her shoe-tops—which were stout as a man's and apparently as big. About her shoulders was a reefing jacket, also of brown velvet, fastened with big horn buttons; above this came a loose cherry-red scarf of finest silk in perfect harmony with the brown of the velvet; above this again was a head surmounted by a mass of fluffy, partly gray hair, parted on one side—as Rosa Bonheur wore hers. Then came two brilliant agate eyes, two ruddy cheeks, and a sunny, happy mouth filled with pearl-white teeth.

One smile—and it came with the radiance of a flashlight—and all misgivings vanished. There was no question of her charm, of her refinement, or of her birth. Neither was there any question as to her thorough knowledge of the world.

"I knew you were all down here for a good time," she began in soft, low, musical tones, when the introductions were over, "and would understand if I came just as I was. I have been hunting all day—tramping the fields with my dogs—and I would not even stop to rearrange my hair. It was so good of you to let me come; and I love this room—its atmosphere is so well bred, and it is never so charming as when the firelight dances about it. Ah, Monsieur Lemois! I see some new things. Where did you get that duck of a sauce-boat?—and another Italian mirror! But then there is no use trying to keep up with you. My agent offered what I thought was three times its value for that bit of Satsuma, and I nearly broke my heart over it—and here it is! You really *should* be locked up as a public nuisance!"

We turned instinctively toward Lemois, remembering his queer, dry smile when he referred to her coming, but his only reply to her comment was a low bow to the woman of rank, with the customary commonplace, that all of his curios were at her disposal if she would permit him to send them to her, and with this left the room.

"And now where shall I sit?" she bubbled

on. "Next to you, I hope, my dear Monsieur Herbert. You do not know me—never heard of me, perhaps—but I know all about you and the wonderful things you have accomplished. And you too, Monsieur Louis. I remember your first success as I do those of most of the young men who have won their medals for twenty years back. And you, Monsieur Brierley—and—can I say it?—Monsieur High-Muck"—and she nodded gayly at me. "And now you will all please give your imagination free rein. Try and remember that I am not a hideous old woman in corduroys and high boots, but a most delightful and bewitching demoiselle; and please remember, too, that I can wear a décolleté gown if I please, only I don't please, and haven't pleased for ten years or more."

Her perfect poise and freedom from all conventionality put us at once at our ease, making us forget she had only been among us a few minutes.

"And how clever you are to have chosen this room for these delightful meetings, of which Monsieur Marc has told me," she continued, her eyes wandering again over the several objects, while her personality completely domi-

nated everything. "Nobody but Lemois would have brought them all together. What a genius he is! Think of his putting that wooden angel where its golden crown can become an aureole in the candle-light: he has done that since my last visit. And that other one—really the rarest thing he owns—in the dark corner by the fireplace. May I tell you about it before he comes back? It is of the fifteenth century, and is called the 'Bella Nigra'—the Black Virgin. Look at it, all of you, while I hold the candle. You see the face is black, the legend running, 'I am beautiful though black because the sun has looked at me so long.' You notice, too, that she has neither arms nor legs—a symbol of nobility, showing she need neither work nor walk, and the triple crown means that she is Queen of Heaven, Earth, and Sea. Why he pokes her in a dark corner I cannot imagine, except that it is just like him to do the queerest things—and say them too. And yet, he is *such* a dear—and *so* funny! You cannot think what funny things he does and says until you watch him as I have. Why is it, Monsieur Brierley, that you have never put him into one of your books—you who write such charming

stories of our coast? Only this summer something occurred which I laugh over every time I think of it. The Cabourg races were on and the court-yard outside was packed with people who had come for luncheon before the Prix Lagrange was run. They were making a good deal of noise—a thing the old gentleman hates, especially from loudly dressed women. I was at the next table, sheltered from the others, and was enjoying the curious spectacle —such people always interest me—when I noticed Monsieur Lemois rubbing his hands together, talking to himself, his eyes fixed on the group. I knew one of his storms was brewing, and was wondering what would happen, when I saw him start forward as another uproarious laugh escaped one of the most boisterous.

"'Mademoiselle,' he said in his softest and most courteous tone, hat in hand, bowing first to her and then to her male companions; 'mademoiselle, I love to hear you laugh; I built this place for laughter, but when you laughed so *very* loud a moment ago my flowers were so ashamed they hung their heads,' and then he kept on bowing, his hat still in his hand, his face calm, his manner scrupulously polite. No-

body was offended. They seemed to think it was some kind of a compliment; the rebuked woman even turned her head toward the big hydrangeas as if trying to find out how they really felt about it. Oh!—he is too delicious for words."

And so it went on until before the dinner was over she had captured every man in the room—both by what she said and the way she said it—her eyes flashing like a revolving light, now dim, now brilliant with the thoughts behind them, her white teeth gleaming as she talked. Marc seemed beside himself with pride and happiness. "Never was there such a woman," he was pouring into Herbert's ear; "and you should see her pictures and her stables and her gun-room. Really the most extraordinary creature I have ever known! Does just as she pleases—a tramp one day and a duchess the next. And you should watch her at the head of her table in her château—then you will know what a real 'Grande Dame' is."

While the others were crowding about her, Marc eager to anticipate her every wish in the way of cushions, footstools, and the like, I went to find Lemois, who was just outside, his hands laden with a tray of cordials.

"You know her then?"

"Oh, for years," he whispered back. "I did not tell you, for I wanted to see your surprise and surrender. It is always the same story with her. She does not live here except for a month or so in the autumn, when the small villa on the bluff above Buezval—two miles from here—is opened; a little box of a place filled with costly bric-à-brac. Her great château—the one in which she really lives—is on an estate of some thousands of acres near Rouen, and is stocked with big game—boar and deer. The marquis—and a great gentleman he was—died some twenty years ago. Madame paints, carves ivories, binds books, shoots, fishes, speaks five languages, has lived all over the world and knows everybody worth knowing. No one in her youth was more beautiful, but the figure has gone, as you see—and it is such a pity, for it was superb; only the eyes and the teeth are left—and the smile. That was always her greatest charm, and still is—except her charities, which never cease."

Her musical voice was still vibrating through the room as I re-entered.

"No, I don't agree with you, Monsieur Herbert," she was saying. "It is shameful that

we do not keep closer to the usages and requirements of the old régime. In my time a woman would have excited comment who did not wear her finest gown and her choicest jewels in so select a company as this; and often very extraordinary things happened when any one defied the mandate. I remember one very queer instance which I wish I could tell you about—and it resulted in all sorts of dreadful complications. I became so adept a fibber in consequence that I wasn't able to speak the truth for months afterward—and all because this most charming girl wouldn't wear a low gown at one of our dinners."

Herbert beat the air with his hand. "Keep still, everybody—madame la marquise is going to tell us a story."

"Madame la marquise is going to do nothing of the kind. She has enough sins of her own to answer for without betraying those of this poor girl."

"Hold up your hands and swear secrecy, every one of you!" cried Louis.

"But who will absolve me from breaking the commandment? You will never have any respect for me again—you remember the rule—all liars shall have their portion—don't you?"

"If madame will permit me," said Lemois with a low bow, "I will be her father-confessor, for I alone of all this group know how good she really is."

"Very well, I take you at your word, Fra Lemois, and to prove how good *you* are, you shall send me the Satsuma with your compliments, and pick from my collection anything that pleases you. But you must first let me have a cigarette. Wait"—she twisted back her arm and drew a gold case from the side pocket of her jacket—"yes, I have one of my own—one I rolled myself, and I cure my own tobacco too, if you please. No! no more Burgundy" (she had declined my carefully selected Chablis and had drank the heavier wine with the rest of us). "That Romanée Conti I know, and it generally gets into my head, and I don't like anything in my head except what I put there myself. What did you want me to do? Oh, yes, tell you that story of my youth.

"Well, one day my dear husband received a letter from an English officer, a dear friend of his with whom he had had the closest relations when they were both stationed in Borneo. This letter told us that his daughter, whom,

as we knew, had been captured by the Dyaks when she was a child of eight, had been found some three years before by a scouting party and returned to the English agent at the principal seaport, the name of which I forget. Since that time she had been living with a relative, who had sent her to school. She had now completed her education, the letter went on to say, and was on her way back to England to join him, he being an invalided officer on half-pay. Before reaching him he wanted her to see something of the world, particularly of French life, and knew of no one with whom he would be more willing to trust her than ourselves. She was just grown—in her eighteenth year—and, although she had passed seven years of her life among a wild tribe, was still an English girl of prepossessing appearance.

"Well, she came—a beautifully formed, graceful creature, with flashing black eyes, a clear skin, and with a certain barbaric litheness when she moved that always reminded me of a panther, it was so measured, and had such meaning in it. She brought some expensive clothes, but no décolleté dresses of any kind, which surprised me, and when I offered to lend her my own—we were of about the same size—

she refused politely but firmly, which surprised me all the more, and went right on wearing her high-necked gowns, which, while good in themselves—for her people were not poor—were not exactly the kind of toilettes my husband and my guests had been accustomed to—certainly not at dinners of twenty.

"At every other function she was superb, and for each one had the proper outfit and of the best make. She rode well, danced well, sang like a bird, could shoot and hunt with any of us, and, with the exception of this curious whim—for her form was faultless—was one of the most delightful creatures who ever stayed with us—and we had had, as you may suppose, a good many. The subjects she avoided were her captivity and the personnel of those with whom she had lived. When pressed she would answer that she had told the story so often she was tired of it; had banished it from her mind and wished everybody else would.

"Then the expected happened. Indeed I had begun to wonder why it had not happened before. A young Frenchman, the only son of one of our oldest families, a man of birth and fortune, fell madly in love with her. The

mother was up in arms, and so was the father. She was without title, and, so far as they knew, without fortune in her own right; was English, and the match could not and should not take place.

"How the girl felt about it we could not find out. Sometimes she would see him alone, generally in the dusk of the evening on the lawn, but though she was English, and we had given the full limit of her freedom, she always kept within sight of the veranda. At other times she refused to see him altogether, sending word she was ill, or engaged, or had friends, all of which I found extraordinary. This went on until matters reached a crisis. She knew she must either send him about his business or succumb: this was *her* problem. *His* problem was to win her whether or no; if not here, then in England, where he would follow her; and he took no pains to conceal it. His persistence was met by a firm refusal, and finally by a command to leave her alone. The dismissal was given one night after dinner when they were together for a few minutes in the library, after which, so my maid told me, she went to her room and threw herself on her bed in an agony of tears.

"But there is nothing for sheer obstinacy like a Frenchman in love. Indeed he was too far gone to believe a word she said or take no for an answer, and as my grounds were next to his mother's, and the two families most intimate, he still kept up his visits to the house, where, I must say, he was always welcome, for my husband and I liked him extremely, and he deserved it. His mother, objecting to the marriage, wanted to keep him away. She insisted—all this I heard afterward—that the girl was half savage and looked and moved like one; that she had doubtless been brought up among a lawless tribe who robbed every one around them; that there was no knowing what such a girl had done and would not do, and that she would rather see her son lying dead at her feet—the usual motherly exaggeration—than see him her victim. This brought him at last to his senses, for he came to me one day and wanted me to tell him what I knew of her antecedents as well as the story of her captivity and life with the savages. This was a difficult situation to face, and I at first refused to discuss her private affairs. Then I knew any mystery would only make him the more crazy, and so I told him what I knew, omitting the

more intimate details. Strange to say, Frenchman-like, it only maddened him the more—so much so that he again waylaid her and asked her some questions which made her blaze like coals of fire, and again the poor girl went to bed in a flood of tears.

"Then the most puzzling and inexplicable thing happened. I had a very deep topaz of which I was passionately fond—one given me by my dear husband shortly after we were married. I generally kept it in my small jewel case, to which only my maid and I had the key. This night when I opened it the jewel was gone. My maid said she remembered distinctly my putting it, together with the chain, in the box, for my guest was with me at the time and had begged me to wear it because of its rich color, which she always said matched my eyes. At first I said nothing to any one—not even my husband—and waited; then I watched my maid; then my butler, about whom I did not know much, and who was in love with the maid, and might have tempted her to steal it. And, last of all—why I could not tell, and cannot to this day, except for that peculiar pantherlike movement about my guest—I watched the girl herself. But nothing came of it.

"Then I began to talk. I told my husband; I told the young man's mother, my intimate friend, who told her son, she accusing the girl, of course, without a scintilla of proof; I told my butler, my maid—I told everybody who could in any way help to advertise my loss and the reward I was willing to pay for its recovery. Still nothing resulted and the week passed without a trace of the jewel or the thief.

"One morning just after luncheon, when I was alone in my little boudoir and my husband and the young man were having their coffee and cigarettes on the veranda outside, the girl walked in, made sure that no one was within hearing, and held out her hand. In the palm was my lost topaz.

"'Here is your jewel,' she said calmly; 'I stole it, and now I have brought it back.'

"'You!' I gasped. 'Why?'

"'To disgust him and make him hate me so that he will never see me again. I love him too much to give myself to him. In my madness I thought of this.'

"'And you want him to know it!' I cried out. I could hardly get my breath, the shock was so great.

"'Yes—*here!*—NOW!' She stepped to the

door. 'Monsieur,' she called, 'I have something to tell you. I have just brought back her jewel—I stole it! Now come, madame, to my room and I will tell you the rest!'

"I followed her upstairs, leaving the horror-stricken young man dazed and speechless. She shut the door, locked it, and faced me.

"'I have lied to both of you, madame. I did not steal your jewel; nobody stole it. I found it a few minutes ago under the edge of the rug where it had rolled; you dropped it in my room the night you wore it. In my agony to find some way out I seized on this. It came to me in a flash and I ran downstairs clutching it in my hand, knowing I would be lost if I hesitated a moment. It is over now. He will never see me again!'

"I stood half paralyzed at the situation; she erect before me, her eyes blazing, her figure stretched to the utmost, like an animal in pain.

"'And you deliberately told him you were a thief!' I at last managed to stammer out. 'Why?'

"'Because it was the only way to escape—it was the only way out. I never want him to think of me in any other light—I want to be dead to him forever! Nothing else would

have done; I should have yielded, for I could no longer master my love for him. Look!'

"She was fumbling at her dress, loosening the top buttons close under her chin; then she ripped it clear, exposing her neck and back.

"'This is what was done to me when I was a child!'

"I leaned forward to see the closer. The poor child was one mass of hideous tattoo from her throat to her stays!

"'Now you know the whole story,' she sobbed, her eyes streaming tears; 'my heart is broken but I am satisfied. I could have stood anything but his loathing.'

"With this she fastened her dress and walked slowly out of the room, her head down, her whole figure one of abject misery."

Madame leaned forward, picked up her goblet of water, and remarking that walking in the wind always made her thirsty, drained its contents. Then she turned her head to hide her tears.

"A most extraordinary story, madame. Did the young fellow ever speak of the theft?" asked Herbert, the first of her listeners to speak.

"No," she answered slowly, in the effort to

regain her composure, "he loved her too much to hear anything against her. He knew she had stolen it, for he had heard it from her own lips."

"And you never tried to clear her character?"

"How could I? It was her secret, not mine. To divulge it would have led to her other and more terrible secret, and that I was pledged to keep. She is dead, poor girl, or I would not have told you now."

"And what did you do, may I ask?" inquired Brierley.

"Nothing, except tell fibs. After she had gone the following morning I excused her to him, of course, on every ground that I could think of. I argued that she had a peculiar nature; that owing to her captivity she had perhaps lost that fine sense of what was her own and what was another's; that she had many splendid qualities; that she had only yielded to an impulse, just as a Bedouin does who steals an Arab horse and who, on second thought, returns it. That I had forgiven her, and had told her so, and as proof of it had tried, without avail, to make her keep the topaz. Only my husband knew the truth. 'Let it stay as it is, my dear,' he said to me; 'that girl has

more knowledge of human nature than I credited her with. Once that young lover of hers had learned the cruel truth he wouldn't have lived with her another hour.' "

"I think I should have told him," remarked Louis slowly; the story seemed to have strangely moved him. "If he really loved her he'd have worn green spectacles and taken her as she was —I would. Bad business, this separating lovers."

"No, you wouldn't, Louis," remarked Herbert, "if you'd ever seen her neck. I know something of that tattoo, although mine was voluntary, and only covered a part of my arm. Madame did just right. There are times when one must tell anything but the truth."

Everybody looked at the speaker in astonishment. Of all men in the world he kept closest to the exact hair-line; indeed, one of Herbert's peculiarities, as I have said, was his always understating rather than overstating a fact.

"Yes," he continued, "the only way out is to 'lie like a gentleman,' as the saying is, and be done with it. I've been through it myself and know. Your story, madame, has brought it all back to me."

"It's about a girl, of course," remarked Louis, flashing a smile around the circle, "and your

best girl, of course. Have a drop of cognac, old man," and he filled Herbert's tiny glass. "It may help you tell the *whole* truth before you get through."

"No," returned Herbert calmly, pushing the cognac from him, a peculiar tenderness in his voice; "not my best girl, Louis, but a gray-haired woman of sixty—one I shall never forget."

Madame laid her hand quickly on Herbert's arm; she had caught the note in his voice.

"Oh! I'm so glad!" she said. "I love stories of old women; I always have. Please go on."

"If I could have made her young again, madame, you would perhaps have liked my story better."

"Why? Is it very sad?"

"Yes and no. It is not, I must say, exactly an after-dinner story, and but that it illustrates precisely how difficult it is sometimes to speak the truth, I would not tell it at all. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, please do," she pleaded, a tremor now in her own voice. It was astonishing how simple and girlish she could be when her sympathies were aroused.

"My gray-haired woman had an only son, a man but a few years younger than myself, a member of my own party, who had died some miles from our camp at Bangala, and it accordingly devolved upon me not only to notify his people of his death, but to forward to them the few trinkets and things he had left behind. As I was so soon to return to London I wrote his people that I would bring them with me.

"He was a fine young fellow, cool-headed, afraid of nothing, and was a great help to me and very popular with every one in the camp. Having been sent out by the company to which I belonged, as were many others during the first years of our stay on the Congo, he had already mastered both the language and the ways of the natives. When a pow-wow was to be held I always sent him to conduct it if I could not go myself. I did so, too, when he had to teach the natives a lesson—lessons they needed and never forgot, for he was as plucky as he was politic.

"I knew nothing of his people except that he was a Belgian whose mother, Madame Brion, occupied a villa outside of Brussels, where she lived with a married daughter.

"On presenting my card I was shown into a small library where the young woman received me with tender cordiality, and, after closing the door so that we might not be overheard, she gave me an outline of the ordeal I was about to go through. With her eyes brimming tears she told me how her mother had only allowed her son to leave home because of the pressure brought to bear upon her by his uncle, who was interested in the company; how she daily, almost hourly, blamed herself for his death; how, during the years of his absence, she had lived on his letters, and when mine came, telling her of his end, she had sat dazed and paralyzed for hours, the open page in her lap—no word escaping her—no tears—only the dull pain of a grief which seemed to freeze the blood in her veins. Since that time she had counted the days to my coming, that she might hear the details of his last illness and suffering.

"You can imagine how I felt. I have never been able to face a woman when she is broken down with grief, and but that she was expecting me every minute, and had set her heart on my coming, I think I should have been cowardly enough to have left the house.

"When the servant returned, I was conducted up the broad staircase and into a small room hung with wonderful embroideries and pictures and filled with flowers. In one corner on an easel was Brion's portrait in the uniform of an officer, while all about were other portraits—some taken when he was a child, others as a boy—a kind of sanctuary, really, in which the mother worshipped this one idol of her life."

Herbert stopped, drew the tiny glass of cognac toward him, sipped its contents slowly, the tenderness of tone increasing as he went on:

"She greeted me simply and kindly, and led me to a seat on the sofa beside her, where she thanked me for the trouble I had taken, her soft blue eyes fixed on mine, her gentle, high-bred features illumined with her gratitude, her silver-gray hair forming an aureole in the light of the window behind her, as she poured out her heart. Then followed question after question; she wanting every incident, every word he had uttered; what his nursing had been—all the things a mother would want to know. Altogether it was the severest ordeal I had been through since I left home—and I have had some trying ones.

"For three hours I sat there, giving her minute accounts of his illness, his partial recovery, his relapse; what remedies I had used; how he failed after the fourth day; how his delirium had set in, and how at the last he had passed peacefully away. Next I described the funeral, giving a succinct account of the preparations; how we buried him on a little hill near a spring, putting a fence around the grave to keep any one from walking over it. Then came up the question of a small head-stone. This she insisted she would order cut at once and sent out to me—or perhaps one could be made ready so that I might take it with me. All this I promised, of course, even to taking it with me were there time, which, after all, I was able to do, for my steamer was delayed. And so I left her, her hands on my shoulders, her eyes fixed on mine in gratitude for all I had done for her dead son."

"Oh!—the poor, dear lady!" cried madame la marquise, greatly moved, her hands tight clasped together. "Yes, I believe you—nothing in all your experience could have been as painful!'

Brierley raised his head and looked at Herbert:

"Rather a tight place, old man, awful tight place," and his voice trembled. "But where does the lie come in? You told her the truth, after all."

"Told her the truth! I thought you understood. Why I lied straight through! There *was* no grave—there never had been! Her son and his three black carriers had been trapped by cannibals and eaten."

Madame started from her chair and clutched Herbert's hand.

"Oh!—how terrible! No! you could not have told her!—I would never have liked you again if you had told her. Oh! I am so glad you didn't!"

"There was nothing else to do, madame," said Herbert thoughtfully, his eyes gazing into space as if the recital had again brought the scene before him.

"Pray God she never found out!" said the marquise under her breath.

"That has always been my consolation, madame. So far as I know she never did find out. She is dead now."

"And I wish we had never found out either!" groaned Louis. "Why in the world do you want to make goose-flesh crawl all over a fel-

low! An awful, frightful story. I say, Herbert, if you've got any more horrors keep 'em for another night. I move we have a rest. Drag out that spinet, Brierley, and give us some music."

"No, please don't!" cried the marquise. "Tell us another. I wish this one of Monsieur Herbert's was in print, so that I could read it over and over. Think how banal is our fiction; how we are forever digging in the same dry ground, turning up the same trivialities—affairs of the heart, domestic difficulties—thin, tawdry romances of olden times, all the characters masquerading in modern thought—all false and stupid. Oh! how sick I am of it all! But this epic of Monsieur Herbert means the clash of races, the meeting of two civilizations, the world turning back, as it were, to measure swords with that from which it sprung. And think, too, how rare it is to meet a man who in his own life has lived them both—the savage and the civilized. So please, Monsieur Herbert, tell us another—something about the savage himself. You know so many things and you *are so human.*"

"He doesn't open his lips, madame, until I get some fresh air!" cried Louis. "Throw

back that door, Lemois, and let these hobgoblins out! No more African horrors of any kind! Ladies and gentlemen, you will now hear the distinguished spinetist, Herr Brierley, of Pont du Sable, play one of his soul-stirring melodies! Up with you, Brierley, and take the taste out of our mouths!"

V

IN WHICH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CANNIBAL AND A FREEBOOTER IS CLEARLY SET FORTH

TO-NIGHT the circle around the table welcomed the belated Le Blanc, bringing with him his friend, The Architect, who had designed some of the best villas on the coast, and whose fad when he was not bending over his drawing-board was writing plays. Marc, to every one's regret, did not come. After returning with madame to her villa the night of her visit, he had, according to Le Blanc, been lost to the world.

Dinner over and the cigarettes lighted, the men pushed back their chairs; Louis spreading himself on the sofa or great lounge; Brierley in a chair by the fire, with Peter cuddled up in his arms, and the others where they would be the most comfortable; Lemois, as usual, at the coffee-table.

The talk, as was to be expected, still revolved around the extraordinary woman who had so

charmed us the night before; Le Blanc expressing his profound regret at not having been present, adding that he would rather listen to her talk than to that of any other woman in Europe, and I had just finished giving him a résumé of her story about the tattooed girl and her sufferings, when Brierley, who is peculiarly sympathetic, let the dog slip to the floor, and rising to his feet broke out in a tirade against all savage tribes from Dyaks to cannibals, closing his outburst with the hope that the next fifty years would see them all exterminated. Soon the table had taken sides, The Architect, who had lived in Nevada and the far West, defending the noble red man so cruelly debauched by the earlier settlers; Le Blanc siding with Brierley, while Lemois and I watched the discussion, Louis, from his sofa, putting in his oar whenever he thought he could jostle the boat, grewsome discussions not being to his liking.

Herbert, who, dinner over, had been leaning back in his chair, the glow of the firelight touching both his own and the two carved heads above him, and who, up to this time, had taken no part in the talk—Herbert, not the heads, suddenly straightened up, threw away his cigarette, and rested his hands on the table.

"I have not been among the savage tribes in lower Borneo," he said, addressing The Architect; "neither do I know the red Indian as the Americans or their grandfathers may have known him. But I do know the cannibal"—here he looked straight at Le Blanc—"and he is not as black as he is painted. In fact, the white man is often ten times blacker in the same surroundings."

"Not when they roasted your Belgian friend?" cried Louis, with some anger.

"Not even then. There were two sides to that question."

"The brown and the underdone, I suppose," remarked Louis *sotto voce*.

"No, the human."

"But you don't excuse the devils, do you?" broke in Le Blanc. "Their cruelties are incredible. A friend of mine once met a man in Zanzibar who told him he had seen a group of slaves, mostly young girls, who, after being fattened up, were tied together and marched from one of the villages to the other that the buyers might select and mark upon their bodies the particular cuts they wanted."

"I haven't a doubt of it. It's all true," replied Herbert. "I once saw the same thing

myself when I was helpless to prevent it, as I was in hiding at the time and dared not expose myself. Yet I recognized even then that the savage was only following out the traditions of centuries, with no one to teach him any better. We ourselves have savage tastes that are never criticised; to do so would be considered mawkish and sentimental. We feel, for instance, no regret when we wring the neck of a pigeon—that is, we didn't," Herbert added with a dry smile, "until Lemois advanced his theories of 'mercy' the other night. We still feed our chickens in coops, stuff our geese to enlarge their livers, fatten our hogs until they can barely stagger, and, after parading them around the market-places, kill and eat them just as the African does his human product. Even Lemois, with equal nonchalance, hacks up his lobsters while they are alive or plunges them into boiling water—he wouldn't dare serve them to us in any other way. The only difference is that we persuade ourselves that our pigs and poultry are ignorant of what is going to happen to them, while the captured African begins to suffer the moment he is pounced upon by his captors."

"And you mean to tell me you don't blame

these wretches!" burst out Le Blanc. "I'd burn 'em alive!"

"Yes, I am quite sure you would—that is the usual civilized, twentieth-century way, a continuation of the eye-for-an-eye dogma, but it isn't always efficacious, and it is seldom just. The savage has his good side; he can really teach some of us morals and manners, though you may not believe it. Please don't explode again—not now; wait until I get through. And I go even farther, for my experience teaches me that the savage never does anything which he himself thinks to be wrong. I say this because I have been among them for a good many years, speak their dialects, and have had, perhaps, a better opportunity of studying them than most travellers. And these evidences of a better nature can be found, let me tell you, not only among the tribes in what is known as 'White Man's Africa,' opened up by the explorers, but in the more distant parts—out of the beaten track—often where no white man has ever stepped—none at least before me. Even among the cannibal tribes I have often been staggered at discovering traits which were as mysterious as they were amazing—deep human notes of the heart which put the white

man to shame. These traits are all the more extraordinary because they are found in a race who for centuries have been steeped in superstitution with its attendant cruelty, and who are considered incapable even of love because they sell their women.

"You, Le Blanc, naturally break out and want to burn them alive. Lemois, more humane, as he always is, would exercise more patience if he could see anything to build upon. You are both wrong. Indeed, between the educated white man freed from all restraint and turned loose in a savage wilderness, and the uneducated savage I would have more hope of the cannibal than the freebooter, and I say this because the older I grow the more I am convinced that with a great majority of men, public opinion, and public opinion only, keeps them straight, and that when they are far from these restraints they often stoop to a lower level than the savage, unless some form of religion controls their actions. To make this clear I will tell you two stories.

"My first is about a young fellow, a graduate of one of the first universities of Europe. I am not going to preach, nor throw any blame. Some of us in our twenties might have done

what that white man did. I am only trying to prove my statement that the cannibal in his cruelties is only following out the instincts and traditions of his race, which have existed for centuries, while the white man goes back on every one of his. I wish to prove to you if I can that there is more in the heart of a savage than most of us realize—more to build upon, as Lemois puts it.

"Some years ago I met, on the Upper Congo, a young fellow named Goringe, of about twenty-four or five, who had a contract with the company for providing carriers to be sent to the coast for the supplies to be brought back and delivered to the several camps, mine among the others. He, like many an adventurer drawn to that Eldorado of adventure, was a man of more than ordinary culture, a brilliant talker, and of very great executive ability. It was his business to visit the different villages, buy, barter, or steal able-bodied men for so much a month, and rush them in gangs to the coast under charge of an escort. On their return the company paid them and him so much a head. There were others besides Goringe, of course, engaged in the same business, but none of them attained his results, as I had learned from time

to time from those who had come across his caravans in their marches through the jungle.

"One morning a runner came into my camp with a message from Goringe, telling me that he intended passing within a mile or so of where I was; that he was pressed for time or would do himself the honor of calling upon me, and that he would deem it a great favor if I would meet him at a certain crossing where he meant to rest during the heat of the day. I, of course, sent him word that I should be on hand. I hadn't seen him for some years—few other white men, for that matter—and I wanted to learn for myself the secret of his marvellous success. When in London he had worn correct evening clothes, a decoration in his buttonhole, and was a frequenter of the best and most exclusive clubs—rather a poor training, one would suppose, for the successful life he had of late been leading in the jungle—and it *was* successful so far as the profits of the home company were concerned. While their other agents would hire ten men—or twenty—in a long march of months, gathering up former carriers out of work, some of whom had served Stanley in his time, Goringe would get a hundred or more of fresh recruits, all able-bodied

savages capable of carrying a load of sixty-five pounds no matter what the heat or how rough the going.

"I arrived at the crossing first and waited—waited an hour, perhaps two—before his vanguard put in an appearance. Then, to use one of Louis' expressions, I 'sat up and began to take notice.' I had seen a good many barbaric turnouts in my time—one in India when I was the guest of a maharaja, who received me at the foot of a steep hill flanked on either side by a double row of elephants in gorgeous trappings, with armed men in still more gorgeous costumes filling the howdahs; another in Ceylon, and another in southern Spain at Easter time—but Goringe's march was the most unique and the most startling spectacle I had ever laid my eyes on, so much so that I hid myself in a mass of underbrush and let the last man pass me before I made myself known.

"The vanguard was composed of some twenty naked men, black as tar, of course, and armed with spears and rawhide shields. These were the fighters, clearing the way for my lord, the white man. These were followed by a dozen others carrying light articles: the great man's india-rubber bath-tub, his guns,

ammunition, medicine-chest, tobacco, matches, and toilette articles—with such portions of his wardrobe as he might choose to enjoy. Separated from the contaminating touch of those in front by a space of some twenty feet and by an equal distance from those behind, came Goringe, walking alone, like a potentate of old. As he passed within a few yards of where I lay concealed I had ample opportunity to study every detail of his personality and make-up. I was not quite sure that it was he; then I got his smile and the peculiar debonair lift of his head. Except that he was fifty pounds heavier, he was the man with whom I had dined so often in London.

"On his head was a pith helmet that had once been white, round which was wound a yard or more of bright-red calico. A dozen strings of gaudy beads bound his throat and half covered his bare chest. After that there was nothing but his naked skin—back and front, as far down as his waist, from which hung a frock of blue denim falling to his knees—then more bare skin, and then his feet wrapped in goat-skins. In his hand he carried a staff which he swung from side to side as he walked with lordly stride.

"His harem followed: thirty girls in single file, dressed in the prevailing fashion of the day—a petticoat of plantain leaves and a string of beads. Each of them carried a gaudy paper umbrella like those sold at home for sixpence. Some of the girls were slim and tall, some fat; but all were young and all bore themselves with an air of calm distinction, as if conscious of their alliance with a superior race. Bringing up the rear was a long line of carriers loaded down with tents, provisions, and other camp equipage.

"When it had all passed I stepped quickly through the forest, got abreast of my lord the white man, and shouted:

"'Goringe!'

"He turned suddenly, lifted the edge of his helmet, threw his staff to one of his men, and came quickly toward me.

"'By the Eternal, but I'm glad to see you! I was afraid you were going back on me! It was awfully decent in you to come. You didn't mind my sending for you, did you? I've got to make the next village by sundown, and then I'm going up into the Hill Country, and may not be this way again for months—perhaps never. How well you look! What do you think of my turnout?'

"I told him in reply, that it was rather remarkable—about as uncivilized as anything I had ever seen—and was on the point of asking some uncomfortable questions when, noting my disapproval, he switched off by explaining that it was the only way he could make a penny, and again turned the conversation by exclaiming abruptly:

"'Saw my wives, didn't you?—every one of them the daughter of a chief. You see, I buy the girl, and so get even with her father, am made High Pan-Jam with the red button and feather, or next of kin to the chief by blood-letting—anything they want. I'm scarred all up now mixing my precious ancestral fluid with that of these blacklegs, and am first cousin to half the cutthroats on the river. Next I start on the carriers, pick 'em out myself, and send 'em down to the agent. The home company is getting ugly, so I hear, and wonder why they owe me so much for the carriers I've sent them—pretty near six hundred pounds sterling, now. They think there is something crooked about it, but I'm keeping it up. I'm going down when the row is over and present my bill, and they've got to pay it or I'll know the reason why. Now we'll have tiffin.'

"I watched his women crowd about him.

One spread a blanket for his royal highness to sit on; two or more busied themselves getting the food together; one, parasol in hand, planted herself behind him to shield his precious head from the few sunbeams that filtered through the overhanging leaves, fanning him vigorously all the while.

"With the serving of the meal and the uncorking of a bottle in which he kept what he called his 'private stock,' he gave me further details of his methods with the natives. When a chief was at war with another tribe, for instance, he would move into the first village he came to, spread his own tent and those of his wives, post his retainers, and then despatch one of his men to the other combatant, commanding a powwow the next morning. Everybody would come—everybody would talk, including himself, for he spoke Kinkongo and Bangala perfectly. Then when he had patched up their difficulties, he would distribute presents, get everybody drunk on palm wine, and would move on next day with a contribution of carriers from both tribes, adding with a wink, 'And the trick works every time.'"

Herbert paused for a moment and his lips curled.

"Now there's a specimen white man for you! To have expressed my disgust of his methods in the way I would have liked to do—and I can be pretty ugly at times—would, under the circumstances, have been impossible, although there was no question in my mind of his cruelty nor of his sublime selfishness. The world was his oyster and he opened it at his leisure. He knew as well as I did what would become of the women when he was through with them—that they would either be sold into slavery or eaten —and he knew, too, how many of those poor devils of carriers would go to their death, for the mortality among them is fearful—and yet none of it ever made the slightest impression on him. Now I could excuse that sort of thing in Tippoo Tib, whom I knew very well. He was a slave-trader and the most cruel ruffian that was ever let loose on the natives; but this man was an Anglo-Saxon, a graduate of a university, speaking French and German fluently, with a good mother, and sisters, and friends; a man whom you could no doubt find to-night perfectly dressed and heartily welcomed in a London club, or in the foyer of some theatre in Paris, for his father has since died and he has come into his property. And

yet the environment and the absence of public opinion had reduced him to something worse than a savage, and so I say again, one can excuse a cannibal whose traditions and customs have known no change for centuries, but you cannot excuse a freebooter who goes back on every drop of decent blood in his veins."

Before any one could reply The Architect was on his feet waving his napkin. "By Jove!" he cried, "what a personality! Wouldn't he be a hit in comic opera! And think what could be done with the scenery; and that procession of parasols, with snakes hanging down from the branches, and monkeys skipping around among the leaves! Robinson Crusoe wouldn't be in it—why, it would take the town by storm! Girls in black stockinette and bangles, savages, spears, palms, elephant tusks, Goringe in a helmet and goat-skin shoes! I'll tell Michel Carré about it the first time I see him."

"And every one of Goringe's girls a beautiful seductive houri," chimed in Louis with a wink at Le Blanc. "You seem to have slurred over all the details of this part of the panorama, Herbert."

"Oh, ravishingly beautiful, Louis! Half of

them were greased from head to foot with palm-oil, and smeared with powdered camwood that changed them to a deep mahogany; all had their wool twisted into knobs and pigtails, and most of them wore pieces of wood, big as the handle of a table knife, skewered through their upper lips. Oh!—a most adorable lot of houris."

"All the better," vociferated The Architect. "Be stunning under the spotlights. Tell me more about him. I may write the libretto myself and get Livadi to do the music. It's a wonderful find! Did you ever see Goringe again?"

"No, but I kept track of him. The Belgian home company went back on their contract, and refused to pay him just as he feared they would; they claimed he didn't and couldn't have supplied that number of carriers—the sort of defence a corporation always makes when they want to get out of a bad bargain. This decided him. He made a bee-line for the coast, sailed by the first steamer, brought suit, tried it himself, won his case, got his money and a new contract; took the first train for Monte Carlo, lost every penny he had in a night; went back to Brussels, got a second con-

tract, sailed the same week for the Congo, and when I left Bangala for home had another caravan touring the country—bigger than the first—fitted out with the best that money could buy——"

"Including his wives, of course," suggested Louis.

"Yes, but not the lot he had left behind," added Herbert slowly, a frown settling on his brow. "They had long since been wiped out of existence."

The Architect pounded the table until the glasses rattled. "Superb! Magnificent! That finishes the libretto! Carré shan't have it; I'll write it myself! But tell me please, if——"

Lemois opened his fingers deprecatingly, his gaze fixed good-naturedly on the speaker.

"You will pardon me, my dear friend, but Monsieur Herbert is only half through. He is not writing a play; he is introducing us to a higher standard of morals and perhaps of manners. Besides, if you listen you may get a fourth act and a climax which will be better than what you have. He has promised to convince Monsieur Le Blanc, who has not yet said a word, that the savage should not be burnt alive, and to convince me that there is some-

thing in that terrible blackamoor worthy of my admiration, even if he does dine on his fellow men. We have yet to hear Monsieur Herbert's second story."

"All right, Lemois, but I doubt if it will help our distinguished guest here to complete his scenario; but here goes:

"When I was chief of Bangala Station, circumstances made it necessary for me to make an expedition into the Aruwimi District, inhabited by a tribe now known as the Waluheli—cannibals and typical savages so far as morals and habits were concerned. These people, as I afterward learned, are possessed of great physical strength and are constantly on the warpath, trading among each other between times in slaves, ivory, and native iron ore. They live in huts made of grass stalks and plaited palm-leaves. Manioc is about the only food. This, of course, the women till. In fact, that which protects her from being sold as food is often her value as a worker, for one of their beliefs is that women have no souls and no future state.

"I took with me five carriers and some fifteen fighting men and struck due east. It was the customary outfit, each man carrying sixty-

five pounds of baggage, including tent, guns, ammunition, etc. The Aruwimi District, we had heard, was rich in plantains, as well as game, and we needed both, and the fighting men served for protection in case we were attacked, and as food carriers if we were not.

"The first day's march brought us to a small river, a branch of the larger tributaries of the Upper Congo, which we crossed. Then followed a three days' march which led us to a hilly country where the villages were few and far between, and although the natives we met on the trail were most friendly—indeed some of their men had helped make up my gangs, two of them joining my escort—no food was to be had, and so I was obliged to push on until I struck a stretch that looked as if the plantains and manioc could be raised. Still further on I discovered traces of antelope and zebra and some elephants' tracks. Although the villages we passed were deserted, the character of the country proved that at some time in the past both plantains and a sort of yam had been raised in abundance, which led me to believe we could get what we wanted.

"In this new country, too, we met a new kind of native, different from those to whom I

had been accustomed, who, on discovering us, crouched behind trees and bunches of tangled vines, brandishing their spears and shields, but making no direct assault. Coming suddenly upon eight or ten warriors in fording a small brook, I walked boldly in among them, shouting that we were friendly and not enemies. They listened without moving and in a moment more my men had cut off their retreat and had surrounded them. Then I discovered that they spoke one of the dialects I knew—the Mabunga — and after that we had no trouble. Indeed, they directed us to their village, where that night my bed was spread in their largest hut. Next day I started bartering and soon had all the provisions we could carry, the currency, as usual, being glass beads and a few feet of brass and copper wire, with some yards of calico for the women and the chief. I should then have turned in another direction, but early the next morning, as I was getting ready to leave, one of my men brought news of an elephant who the night before had been seen destroying their crops. The temptation was too strong—no, don't laugh, Louis, I have reformed of late—and I dropped everything and started for the game. Meat for our

camp, and especially for the friendly village, would be a godsend, and, taking five men, I was soon on his track. They are strong-legged and quick movers, these elephants, and a few hours' start makes it difficult for a white man to catch up with them. All that day I followed him, never getting near him, although the spoor, stripped saplings, and vines showed that he was but a few miles ahead. At nightfall I gave him up, sent my men back, and, to avoid fording a deep stream, made a short détour to the right. The sun had set and darkness had begun to fall. And it comes all at once and almost without warning in these parts.

"My men being out of reach, I pushed ahead until I struck a narrow path twisting in and out of the heavier trees and less tangled underbrush. Here I came upon an open place with signs of cultivation and caught sight of another unexpected village, the first I had run across in that day's march. This one, on nearer approach, proved to be a collection of small huts straggling along the edge of what at last became a road or street. Squatting in front of these rude dwellings sat the inhabitants staring at me in wonder—the first white man they had ever seen.

"It was a curious sight and an uncanny one—these silent black savages watching my advance. One man had thrown his arm around his wife, as if to protect her; she crouching close to him—both naked as the day they were born. I used the pair in a group I exhibited two or three years ago which bore the title, 'They Have Eyes and See Not'—you may perhaps remember it. I wanted to express the instinctive recognition of the savage for what he feels dimly is to conquer him, and I tried as well to give something of the pathos of the surrender.

"There was no movement as I approached—no greeting—no placing of yams, coarse corn, and pieces of dried game and dried meat on the ground at their feet, especially the flesh of animals, in preparing which they are experts, a whole carcass being sometimes so dried. They only stared wonderstruck—absorbed in my appearance. Now and then, as I passed rapidly along so as to again reach my men before absolute darkness set in, I would stop and make the sign of peace. This they returned, showing me that their customs, and I hoped their language, was not unlike what I understood.

"When I was abreast of the middle of the

village a sudden desire for a pipe—that solace of the lone man—took possession of me and I began fumbling about my clothes for my matchbox. Then I remembered that I had given it to one of my carriers to start our morning blaze. I now began to scan the dwellings I passed for some signs of a fire. My eye finally caught between the supports of the last hut on the line the glow of a heap of embers, and huddled beside it the dim outline of two figures—that of a man and a woman.

"For a moment I hesitated. I was alone, out of the hearing of my followers, and darkness was rapidly falling. As long as I kept on a straight course I was doubtless safe; if I halted or, worse yet, if I entered his hut without invitation, the result might be different. Then the picture began to take hold of me: the rude primeval home; the warmth and cheer of the fire; the cuddling of man and wife close to the embers, the same the world over whether cannibal or Christian. Involuntarily my thoughts went back to my own fireside, thousands of miles away: those I loved were sitting beside the glowing coals that gave it life, a curl of smoke drifting toward the near hills.

"I turned sharply, walked straight into the hut, and, making the sign of peace, asked in Mabunga for a light for my pipe.

"The man started—I had completely surprised him—sprang to his feet, and, looking at me in amazement, returned my greeting in the same tongue, touching his forehead in peaceful submission as he spoke. The woman made neither salutation nor gesture. I leaned over to pick up a coal, and, to steady myself, laid my hand on the woman's shoulder.

"It was cold and hard as wood!

"I bent closer and scanned her face.

"She was a dried mummy!

"The man's gaze never wavered.

"Then, he said slowly: 'She was my woman—I loved her, and I could not bury her!'"

Herbert's dénouement had come as an astounding surprise. He looked round at the circle of faces, his eyes resting on Le Blanc's and Lemois' as if expecting some reply.

The older man roused himself first.

"Your story, Monsieur Herbert," he said with a certain quaver in his voice, "has opened up such a wide field that I no longer think

of the moral, although I see clearly what you intended to prove. When your climax came" —and his eyes kindled—"I felt as if I were standing on some newly discovered cliff of modern thought, below which rolled a thick cloud of superstition rent suddenly by a flash of human sympathy and love. Below and beyond stretched immeasurable distances fading into the mists of the ages. You will excuse the way I put it—I do not mean to be fanciful nor pedantic—but it does not seem that I can express my meaning in any other way. *Mon Dieu*, what a lot of cheap dancing jacks we are! We dig and sell our product; we plead to save a criminal; we toil with our hands and scheme with our heads, and when it is all done it is to get a higher place in the little world we ourselves make. Once in a while there comes a flash of lightning like this from on high and the cloud is rent in twain and we look through and are ashamed. Thank you again, Monsieur Herbert. You have widened my skull—cracked it open an inch at least, and my heart not a little. Your savage should be canonized!"

And he left the room.

VI

PROVING THAT THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE NEVER DID RUN SMOOTH

MIGNON'S coffee-roaster was silent this morning. By listening intently a faint rhythm could be heard coming from beyond the kitchen door, telling that she was alive and about her work, but the garden was not the scene of her operations. Rain had fallen steadily all night and was still at it, driving every one within doors. Furthermore, somewhere off in the North Sea the wind had suddenly tumbled out of bed and was raising the very Old Harry up and down the coast. Reports had come in of a bad wreck along shore, and much anxiety was felt for the fishing fleet.

To brave such a downpour seemed absurd, and so we passed the morning as best we could. I made a sketch in color of the Marmouset; Herbert and Brierley disposed themselves about the room reading, smoking, or criticising my work; Louis upstairs was stretching a canvas—nothing appealed to him like a storm—

and he had determined, as soon as the deluge let up—no moderate downpour ever bothers him—to paint the surf dashing against the earth cliffs that frowned above the angry sea. Lemois did not appear until near noon, his excuse being that he had lain awake half the night thinking of Herbert's story of the African's dried wife, and had only dropped off to sleep when the fury of the storm awoke him.

As luncheon was about to be served, Le Blanc arrived in his car one mass of mud, the glass window in the rear of the cover smashed by the wind. He brought news of a serious state of things along the coast. The sea in its rage, so his story ran, was biting huge mouthfuls out of the bluffs, the yellow blood of the dissolving clay staining the water for half a mile out. One of the card-board, jig-saw, gimcrack villas edging the cliff had already slid into the boiling surf, and the rest of them would follow if the wind held for another hour.

We drew him to the fire, helped him off with his drenched coat, each of us becoming more and more thoughtful as we listened to his description. Leà and Mignon, unheeded, came in bearing the advance dishes—some oysters and crisp celery. They were soon fol-

lowed by Lemois, who, instead of helping, as was his invariable custom, in the arrangement of the table, walked to the hearth and stood gazing into the coals. He, too, was thoughtful, and after a moment asked if we would permit Mignon to replace him at the coffee-table that evening, as he must be off for a few hours, and possibly all night, explaining in answer to our questions that the storm had already reached the danger line, and he felt that as ex-mayor of the village he should be within reach if any calamity overtook the people and fishermen in and around Buezval. We all, of course, offered to go with him—Louis being especially eager—but Lemois insisted that we had better finish our meal, promising to send for us if we were really needed.

His departure only intensified our apprehensions as to the gravity of the situation. What had seemed to us at first picturesque, then threatening, assumed alarming proportions. The gale too, during luncheon, had gone on increasing. Great puffs of smoke belched from the throat of the chimney into the room, and we heard the thrash of the rain and shrill wails of the burglarious wind rising and falling as it fingered the cracks and crevices of the old

building. Now and then an earthen tile would be ripped from the roof and sent crashing into the court. "By Jove!—just hear that wind!" followed by an expectant silence, interrupted almost every remark.

As the fury of the storm increased we noticed that a certain nervous anxiety had taken possession of our pretty Mignon, who, at one crash louder than the others, so far forgot herself as to go to the window, trying to peer out between the bowed shutters, her baffled eyes seeking Leà's for some comforting assurance, the older woman, without ceasing her ministrations to our needs, patting the girl's shoulder in passing.

Suddenly the great outside door of the court, which had been closed to break the force of the wind, gave way with a bang; then came the muffled cry of a man in distress, and Gaston burst in, clad in oilskins, his south-wester tied under his chin, rivers of rain pouring from his hat and overalls. Mignon gave a half-smothered sob of relief and would have sunk to the floor at his feet had not Leà caught her.

The young fisherman staggered back against the edge of the fire-jamb, his hand on his chest.

"It's madame la marquise!" he gasped. He

had run the two miles from Buezval and had barely breath enough to reach the Inn. "I came for Monsieur Lemois! There isn't a moment to lose—the sea is now up to the porch. She is lost if you wait!"

"Madame lost!" we cried in unison.

"No," he panted, "the house. She is not there. Find Monsieur Lemois!—all of you must come!"

Le Blanc was out of his chair before Gaston had completed his sentence.

"Get your coats and meet me at the garage!" he shouted. "I'll run the motor out; we'll be there in ten minutes! My coat too, Leà!" and he slammed the door behind him.

The old woman clattered upstairs into the several rooms for our ulsters and water-proofs, but Mignon sat still, too overjoyed to move or speak. Gaston, she knew, was going out into the rain again, but he was safe on the land now and not on a fishing craft, fighting his way into the harbor, as she had feared all day. The young fellow looked at her from under the brim of his dripping south-wester, but there was no word of recognition, though he had come as much to tell her he was safe as to summon us to madame's villa. I caught her

lifted eyes and the furtive glance of gratitude she gave him.

It was a wild dash up the coast; Le Blanc driving, Herbert handling the siren, the others packed in, crouching close, Gaston holding to the foot-board, where he roared in our ears the details of the impending calamity, his breath having now come back to him. The cliff, he explained, that supported the tennis court of an adjoining villa had given way, taking with it a slice of madame's lawn, leaving only the gravel walk under her library windows. The surf, goaded by the thrash of the wind, was, when he left, cutting great gashes in the toe of the newly exposed slope. Another hour's work like the last—and it was not high water until four o'clock—would send the cottage heels over head into the sea. Madame was in Paris, and the caretakers—an old fisherman and his wife—too old to work—were panic-stricken, calling piteously for Monsieur Lemois, whom their mistress trusted most of all the people in and about the village.

The end of the shore road had now been reached, our siren blowing continuously. With a twist of the wheel we swerved from the main

highway, climbed a short hill, and chugged along an overhanging road flanked by a row of little black lumps of cottages in silhouette against the white fury of the smashing surf. The third of these, so Gaston said, was madame's. Thank God it was still square-sided and the chimneys still upright. We were in time anyhow!

More than once have I helped in a fire or lent a welcoming hand to a shipwrecked crew breasting an ugly sea in a water-logged boat; but to hold on to a cottage sliding into the sea —as one would to the heels of a would-be suicide determined to dash himself to pieces on the sidewalk below—was a new experience to me.

Not so to Herbert—that is, you would never have supposed it from the way he took hold of things. In less time than I tell it, he had swung wide the rear door of madame's villa, stationed Brierley, Le Blanc, and myself at the side entrances to keep out poachers, formed a line of fishermen (whom Gaston knew) to pass out bric-à-brac, pictures, and rare furniture to the garage at the end of the lawn—the only safe place under cover—and, with Louis to help, was packing it with household goods.

While this was going on, although we did not know it, Lemois was half-way down the slope watching the encroaching sea; calculating the number of minutes which the villa had to live; watching, too, the slow crumbling of the cliff. He knew something of these earth slides—or thought he did—and, catching sight of our rescue party, struggled up to warn us.

But Herbert had not furled a mainsail off Cape Horn for nothing. He also knew the sea and what its savage force could do. He, too, had swept his eyes over the crumbling slopes, noted the wind, looked at his watch, and, bounding back, had given orders to go ahead. There was possibly an hour—certainly thirty minutes—before the house, caught by the tide at high water, would sag, tilt, and pitch head-long, like a bird-cage dropped from a window-sill, and no power on earth could save it. Until then the work of rescuing madame's belongings must go on.

Louis' enormous strength now came into play: first it was an inlaid cabinet, mounted in bronze, with heavy glass doors. This, stripped of its curios, which he crammed into his pockets, was picked up bodily and carried without a break to the garage, a hundred yards

in the rear; then followed bronzes that had taken two men to place on their pedestals; pictures in heavy frames; a harp muffled in a water-proof cover, which became a toy in his hands; even the piano went out on the run and was slid along the porch and down the steps, and, with the aid of Gaston and another fisherman, whirled under cover.

The fight now was against time, Lemois indicating the most valuable articles. Soon the first floor was entirely cleared except for some heavy pieces of furniture, and a dash was made upstairs for madame's bedroom and boudoir, filled with choice miniatures, larger portraits, and the little things she loved and lived with. The pillows were now torn from the beds, emptied, and every conceivable kind of small precious thing—silver-topped toilet articles, an ivory crucifix, bits of Dresden china—all the odds and ends a woman of quality, taste, and refinement uses and must have —were dumped one after another into the pillow-sacks and carried carefully to shelter. Then followed the books and rare manuscripts.

Herbert, who, between every trip to the garage or to the crowd of willing workers out-

side, had paused to watch the sea, now bawled up the staircase ordering every man out. The last moment of safety had arrived. Lemois, intent on rescuing a particular portfolio of etchings, either would not or did not hear. Gaston, more alert, and who had been helping him to carry down an armful of the more precious books, sprang past Herbert, despite his cry, and dashed back up the steps, shouting as he raced on that Lemois was still upstairs. Herbert made a plunge to follow when Louis threw his arms around him.

"No, for God's sake! She's going! Out of this!—quick! Jump, Herbert, or you'll be killed!"

As the two men cleared the doorway there came a racking, splitting, tearing noise; a doubling under of the posts of the front porch; a hail of broken glass and clouds of blinding dust from squares of plaster as the ceilings collapsed; then the whole structure canted—slid ten feet and stopped, the brick chimneys smashing their full length into the crumbling mass. When the dust and flying splinters settled, Herbert and Louis were standing on firm ground within a foot only of the upheaved edge of raw earth. Staring them in the face,

like the upturned feet of a prostrate man, were the bottom timbers of the cottage.

Somewhere inside the chaotic mass lay Lemois and Gaston!

A cry of horror went up from the crowd, made more intense by the shriek of a fisherwoman—Gaston's mother—who just before the crash came had seen her son's head at the library window, and who was now fighting her way to where Herbert was keeping back the mob until he could make up his mind what was best to do. Her breathless news decided him.

"Louis!" he shouted, his voice ringing above the roar of the sea, "pick out two men—good ones—and follow me!"

The four worked their way to a careened window now flattened within a foot of the ground, crawled over the sill, and Herbert calling out to Lemois and Gaston all the while, crept under a tangle of twisted beams, flooring, and furniture, until they reached what was once the farther wall of the library.

Under an overturned sofa, pinned down but unhurt, white with dust and broken plaster and almost unrecognizable, they found our landlord. Gaston lay a few feet away, the breath

knocked out of him, an ugly wound in his head. Lemois had answered their call, but Gaston had given no sign.

Herbert braced himself and in the dim light looked about him. The saving of lives was now a question of judgment, requiring that same instantaneous making up of his mind always necessary when his own life had depended upon the exact placing of a rifle-ball in the skull of a charging elephant. There was not a second to lose. Another slash of the sea and the whole mass might go headlong down the slope, and yet to lift the wrong timber in an effort to free Lemois might topple the entire heap, as picking out the wrong match-stick topples a pile of jackstraws.

He ran his eye over the shattered room; ordered the two fishermen to leave the wrecked building; selected, after a moment's pause, a heavy joist lying across the sofa; stood by while Louis put his shoulder under its edge, his enormous strength bearing the full brunt of the weight; waited until it swayed loose, and then, grabbing Lemois firmly by the coat-collar, dragged him clear and set him on his feet.

Gaston came next, limp and apparently

dead—the blood trickling from his head and spattering his rescuers.

The crowd shouted in unison as they caught sight of Lemois' gray head, all the whiter from the grime of powdered plaster. Then came another and louder shout, followed by another piercing shriek from Gaston's mother as her boy's sagging, insensible body was brought clear of the wreck. None of his bones were broken, none that Lemois could find; something had struck the boy—some falling weight—perhaps a bust from one of the bookcases over his head. That was the last the lad had known until he found his mother kneeling beside him in the rain and mud, where the cold wind and rain revived him.

But our work was not yet over. The miscellaneous assortment of precious things housed in the garage must be rearranged before nightfall and protected against breakage and leakage. Watchmen must be selected and made comfortable in the garage, a telegram despatched to madame at her apartment in Paris, with details of the catastrophe and salvage, and another to her estate at Rouen, and, more important still, Gaston must be carried home, put to bed, and a doctor sent for.

As her boy's sagging, insensible body was brought clear of the wreck

This done, Herbert and the rest of us could go back to the inn in Le Blanc's motor.

The first load brought Herbert, Brierley, and myself, Le Blanc driving: Lemois had remained with Gaston. Mignon, with staring, inquiring eyes, her apron over her head to protect her from the wet, met us at the outer gate, but not a word was said by any of us about Gaston, a crack on a fisherman's head not being a serious affair—and then again, this one was as tough as a rudder-post and as full of spring as an oar—and then, more important still, the poor child with her hungry, tear-stained eyes had had trouble enough for one day, as we all knew. Later when Leà and I were alone, I told her the story, describing Gaston's pluck and bravery and his risking his life to save Lemois—the dear old woman clasping her fingers together as if in church when I added that "he'd be all right in the morning after a good night's rest."

"Pray God nothing happens to him!" she said at last, crossing herself. "Mignon is only a child and it would break her heart. Monsieur Lemois does not wish it, and there is trouble —much trouble—ahead for her, but while there is life there is hope. He is a good Gaston—

his mother and I were girls together; she had only this one left—the boat upset and the father was drowned off *Les Dents Terribles* two years ago."

Louis, whose heart is as big as his body, was less cautious. He must have a word with the girl herself. And so, when we had all gathered before the fire to dry out—for most of us were still wet and all ravenous—he called out to her in his cheery, hearty way:

"That is a plucky garçon of yours, mademoiselle. Monsieur Lemois would have been flattened into a pancake but for him. When the house fell it was Monsieur Gaston who jerked him away from the window and rolled a sofa on top of him. Ah!—a brave garçon, and one who does you credit."

The girl—she was busying herself with her dishes at the time—blushed and said: "Merci, monsieur," her eyes dancing over the praise of her lover, but she was too modest and too well trained to say more.

Again Le Blanc's siren came shrieking down the road. This time it would bring Lemois. I threw on another log to warm them both, and Louis began collecting a small assortment of glasses, Mignon following with a decanter.

Several minutes passed, during which we waited for the heavy tread of fat Le Blanc. Then the door opened and Leà appeared; she was trembling from head to foot and white as a ghost.

"Monsieur wants you—all of you—something has happened! Not you, Mignon—you stay here."

Inside the court-yard, close to the door of the Marmouset, stood Le Blanc's motor. Lemois was on the foot-board leaning over the body of a man stretched out on the two seats.

"Easy now," Lemois whispered to Louis, who had pushed his way alongside of the others crowding about the car. "He collapsed again as soon as you all left. There is something serious I am afraid—that is why I brought him here. His mother wanted to take him home, but that's no place for him now. He must stay here to-night. We stopped and left word for the doctor and he will be here in a minute. Be careful, Monsieur Louis—not in there—upstairs."

Louis was careful—careful as if he were lifting a baby; but he did not delay, nor did he take him upstairs. Picking up the unconscious fisherman bodily in his arms, he bore him clear

of the machine, carried him through the open door of the Marmouset, and stretched him full length on the lounge, tucking a cushion under his head as the lad sank down into the soft mattress.

As the flare of the table candles stirred by the night wind lighted up his face, Mignon, who had been pushing aside the chairs from out the wounded man's way, believing it to be Le Blanc, sprang forward, and with a half-stifled cry sank on her knees beside the boy. Lemois lunged forward, stooped quickly, and grasping her firmly by the arm, dragged her to her feet.

"Leave the room!—you are in the way," he said in low, angry tones. "There are plenty here to take care of him."

Louis, who had moved closer to the girl, and who had already begun to quiet her fears, wheeled suddenly and would have broken out in instantaneous protest had not Leà, her lean, tall body stretched to its utmost, her flat, sunken chest heaving with indignation, stepped in front of Lemois.

"You are not kind, monsieur," she said coldly, with calm, unflinching eyes.

"Hold your tongue! I do not want your

advice. Take her out!—this is no place for her!"

Louis' eyes blazed. Unkindness to a woman was the one thing that always enraged him. Then his better judgment worked.

"Give her to me, Leà," he said. "Come, Mignon! Don't cry, child; he's not hurt so bad; he'll be all right in the morning. Move away there, all of you!" and he led the sobbing girl from the room.

A dull, paralyzing silence fell upon us all. Those of us who knew only the gentle, kind-hearted, always courteous Lemois were dumb with astonishment. Had he, too, received a crack on his head which had unsettled his judgment, or was this, after all, the real Lemois?

The opening of the door and the hurried re-entrance of Louis, followed by the doctor, a short, thick-set man with a bald head, for a time relieved the tension.

"I was on my way near here when your messenger met me," called out the doctor with a nod of salutation to the room at large as he dropped into a chair beside the sufferer, thus supplanting Brierley, who during Lemois' outburst had been wiping the blood-stained face

and lips with a napkin and finger-bowl he had caught up from the table.

There was an anxious hush; the men standing in a half-circle awaiting the decision; the doctor feeling for broken limbs, listening to his breathing, his hand on the boy's heart. Then there came a convulsive movement and the wounded man lifted his head and gazed about him.

The doctor bent closer, studied Gaston's eyes for a moment, rose to his feet, tucked his spectacles into a black leather case which he took from his pocket, and said calmly:

"I think there's no fracture of the skull. I'll know definitely later on. He is, as I at first supposed, suffering from shock and has swallowed a lot of dust. He must have complete rest; get him to bed somewhere and send for a woman in the village to take care of him. I'll come to-morrow. Who carried him in here?"

Louis nodded his head.

"Then pick him up again and, if Monsieur Lemois is willing, put him in the room on the ground floor at the end of the court. I can get at him then from the outside without disturbing anybody. You, gentlemen, so I hear, are down here for your pleasure and not to

run a hospital, and so I will see you are not disturbed."

Louis leaned down, picked the young fisherman up in his arms with no more effort than if he had been handling a bag of flour, and carried him out of the room, across the court, Leà following, and into the basement chamber, where he laid him on the bed, leaving him with the remark:

"Now stay here and take care of him, Leà, no matter what Monsieur Lemois says."

Meanwhile Lemois had poured out a glass of wine for the doctor, waited until he had drank it, thanked him in his most courteous tones for his promptness, bidden him good-night on the threshold, closed the door behind him, and without a word to any of us had resumed his place by the fire.

Another embarrassing silence ensued. Every one felt that the incident, if aggravated by any untimely remarks, might lead up to an outbreak which would bring our visit to a premature close. And yet both Leà and Mignon were so beloved by all of us, and the brutality of the attack upon the little maid was so uncalled for, that we felt something was due to our own self-respect.

Herbert, catching our suggestive glances, essayed the task. He was the man held in most esteem by Lemois, and might perhaps be allowed to say things which the old gentleman would not take from the rest; and then again, whatever the outcome, Herbert could be depended upon to keep his temper no matter what Lemois might answer in return.

"Mignon did nothing, monsieur, except show her love for her sweetheart—why break out on her?" Herbert's voice was low, but there was meaning behind it.

"I won't have this thing!" came the indignant retort, all his poise gone. "That's why I broke out on her. Mignon is not for fishermen, nor ditch-diggers, nor road-makers. She is like my child—I have other things in store for her. I tell you I will not have it go on—she knows why and Leà knows why! I have said so, and it is finished!"

"He about saved your life a little while ago. Does that count for anything?" The words edged their way through tightly closed lips.

"Yes—for me; that is why I brought him home—but he has not saved Mignon's life. He would wreck it. She will marry somebody else and he will marry somebody else. There

are too many thick-heads along the coast now. I decide to steer clear of them."

Louis, who now that his human-ambulance trip was over, had returned to the Marmouset, stood wondering. What had taken place in his absence was a mystery. He had, after depositing his burden, taken Mignon to Pierre and sat her down by the kitchen fire, where he had left her crying softly to herself.

Lemois waited until Louis had found a seat and went on:

"You, gentlemen, are my friends, and so I will explain to you what I would not explain to others. You wonder at what I have just said and done. I try to do my duty—that is my religion, and my only religion. I have tried to do it to-night. With your help I have done what I could to save my friend's property, because she was away and helpless. She has now left to her some of the things she loved. So it is with this girl. Ten years ago I found her, a child of eight, crying in the street. For months she had gotten up at daylight, had washed and dressed her two baby brothers, cooked their breakfast, cleaned house, and tucked in her bedridden mother; but, try as she would, she was late for school—not once,

but several times. This was against the rules, and when the prizes and diplomas were given out, all she got was a scolding. Later on she was dismissed. Because she had no other place to go, and because I had no child of my own, I took her home with me. As I assumed all responsibility for her, and she has no one but me, I shall carry it out to the end, exactly as if she were my daughter. My own daughter should not and would not marry a fisherman, neither shall Mignon. Madame la Marquise de la Caux is in Paris, and I do what I can to look after her belongings. Madame, Mignon's mother, is in heaven, and the remnant of her people God knows where, and so I do what I can to look after their child."

"But has the girl no say in the matter?" broke out Louis angrily. "You are not to live with him—she is."

"That may make some difference in your country, Monsieur Louis, but it makes no difference in mine. In France we parents and guardians are the best judges of what is and what is not good for our children. Now, gentlemen, let us brush it all away. It is very creditable to your hearts to be so interested in the child; I do not blame you. She is very lovely

and very amusing, and when she leaves us—even with the man I shall choose for her—it will be a great grief for me, for you see I am quite alone in the world. So, Monsieur Herbert, there is my hand. Not to have you understand me would be harder than all the rest, for I esteem you as I do no other man. And you too, Monsieur Louis, with your big arms and your big heart. Let us be friends once more. And now I am tired out with the day's work, and if you do not mind I will say 'Good-night!'"

VII

IN WHICH OUR LANDLORD BECOMES BOTH ENTERTAINING AND INSTRUCTIVE

THE experiences of the previous day had left their mark in stiffened joints and blistered hands. Herbert was nursing a wrenched finger, Lemois had discovered a bruised back, and Louis a strained wrist—slight accidents all of them, unheeded in the excitement of the rescue, and only definitely located when the several victims got out of bed the next morning.

The real sufferer was Gaston. Two stitches had been taken in his shapely head and, although he was quite himself and restless as a goat, the doctor had given positive orders to Leà to keep him where he was until his wound should heal. To this Lemois had added another and far more cruel mandate, forbidding Mignon either outside or inside his bedroom door under pain of death, or words to that effect.

It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that the day was passed quietly, the men keeping indoors, although the storm had whirled down the coast, leaving behind it only laughing blue skies and a light wind.

The one exciting incident was a telegram from madame la marquise, thanking Lemois and his "brave body of men" for their heroic services and adding that she would come as soon as possible to inspect what she called her "ruin," and would then give herself the pleasure of thanking each and every one in person. This was followed some hours later by a second despatch inquiring after the wounded fisherman and charging Lemois to spare no expense in bringing him back to health; and a third one from Marc saying he had gone to Paris and would not be back for several days.

The absorbing topic, of course, had been Lemois' outbreak on Mignon and subsequent justification of his conduct. Louis was the most outspoken of all, and, despite Lemois' defence, valiantly espoused the girl's cause, the rest of us with one accord pledging ourselves to fight her battles and Gaston's, no matter at what cost. Brierley even went so far as to offer to relieve Leà, during which blissful in-

terim he would smuggle Mignon in for a brief word of sympathy, but this was frowned upon and abandoned when Herbert reminded us that we were in a sense Lemois' guests and could not, therefore, breed treachery among his servants. To this was added his positive conviction that the girl's sufferings would so tell upon the old man that before many days he would not only regret his attitude, but would abandon his ambitious plans and give her to the man she loved.

If Lemois had any such misgivings there was no evidence of it in his manner. But for an occasional wry face when he moved, due to the blow of the overturned sofa, he was in an exceptionally happy frame of mind. Nor did he show the slightest resentment toward any one of us for not agreeing with him. Even when the twilight hour arrived—a restful hour when the fellowship of the group came out strongest, and men voiced the thoughts that lay closest to their hearts—no word escaped him. Music, church architecture, the influence of Rodin and Rostand on the art and literature of our time, French politics—all were touched upon in turn, but not a word of the condition of Gaston's broken head nor the state of

Mignon's bleeding heart—nothing so harrowing. Indeed, so gay was he, so full of quaint sayings and odd views of life and things, that when Brierley sat down at the spinet and ran his fingers over the keys, giving us snatches of melodies from the current music of the day, he begged for some mediæval anthems "as a slight apology to my suffering ears," and when Brierley complied with what he claimed was an old Italian chant, having found the original in Padua, Lemois branched off into a homily on church music which evinced such a mastery of the subject that even Brierley, who is something of a musician himself, was filled with amazement. Indeed, the discussion was in danger of becoming so heated that the old man, with a twinkle in his eye, relieved the tension with:

"No, you are quite wrong, Monsieur Brierley, if you will forgive me for saying so. Your chant is not Italian; it is Spanish. I have a better way of knowing than by searching among musty libraries and sacristies. When your fingers were touching the keys I looked around my Marmouset to see who was listening beside you gentlemen. I soon discovered that the two heads on Monsieur Herbert's chair

were glum and solemn; they might have been asleep so dull were they. My old Virgin in the corner, which I found in Rouen, and which is unquestionably French, never raised her eyes; but the two carved saints over your head, the ones I got in Salamanca when I was last there, were overjoyed. One smiled so sweetly that I could not take my eyes from her, and the other kept such perfect time with his head that I was sorry when you stopped. So you see, your chant is unquestionably Spanish, and I am glad."

Nor did his spirits flag when dinner was over and he took his place by the coffee-table, handing Mignon the tiny cups without even a look of reproach at the demure, sad-eyed girl who was keeping up so brave a heart.

The change was a delightful one to the coterie. As long as the embarrassing situation continued there was no telling what might happen. A question of cuisine could be settled by more or less cayenne, but the question of a marriage settlement was another affair. Press him too far and the old gentleman might have bundled us all into the street and thrown our trunks after us.

The wisest thing, therefore, was to meet his

cordiality more than half way, an easy solution, really, since his *amende honorable* of the night before had put us all on our mettle. He should be made to realize and at once that all traces of ill feeling of every kind had been wiped out of our hearts.

Herbert, who, as usual when any patching up was to be done, was chief pacificator, opened the programme by becoming suddenly interested in the several rare specimens of furniture that enriched the room in which we sat, complimenting Lemois on his good taste in banishing from his collection the severe, uncomfortable chairs and sofas of Louis XIV and XV, and calling special attention to the noble Spanish and Italian specimens about us, with wide seats, backs, and arms, where, even in the old days, tired mortals could have lounged without splitting their stockings or disarranging their wigs, had the dons and contessas worn any such absurdities.

"Quite true, Monsieur Herbert, but you must remember that the aristocrats of that day never sat down—their mirrors were hung too high for them to see themselves should they recline. It was an era of high heels and polished floors, much low bowing, and overmuch

ceremony. And yet it was a delightful period, and a most instructive one, for the antiquary, even if it did end with the guillotine. I have always thought that nothing so clearly defines the taste and intelligence of a nation as their furniture and house decoration. The frivolities of the Monarchs of the period is to be found in every twist and curve of their several styles, just as the virility and out-door life of the Greeks and Romans are expressed in their solid-marble benches and carved-stone sofas. Since I have no place in my gardens for ruins of this kind, I do not collect them—nor would I if I had. There should be, I think, a certain sane appropriateness in every collection, even in so slight a one as my own, and a Greek garden with a line of motor cars on one side and a Normandy church on the other would, I am afraid, be a little out of keeping," and he laughed softly.

"But you haven't kept close to that rule in this room," said Herbert, gazing about him. "We have everything here from Philip the Second to Napoleon the Third."

"I have kept much closer than you think, Monsieur Herbert. The panels, ceiling, furniture, and stained glass, as well as the fireplace, are more or less of one period. The fixtures,

such as the andirons, candelabra, and curtains, might have been obtained in one of the antiquary shops of the day—if any such existed; and so could the china, silver, and glass. What I had in mind was, not a museum, but a room that would take you into its arms—a restful, warm, enticing room—one full of surprises, too"—and he pointed to his rarest possession, the Black Virgin, half hidden in the recess of the chimney breast. "You see, a very rare thing is always more effective when you come upon it suddenly than when you confront it in the blaze of a window or under a fixed light. Your curiosity is then aroused, and you must stoop to study it. I arrange these surprises for all my most precious things.

"Here, for instance"—and he crossed the room, opened a cabinet, and brought from its hiding-place a crystal chalice with a legend in Latin engraved in gold letters around the rim, placing it on the table so that the light from the candelabra could fall upon it—"here is something now you would not look at twice, perhaps, if it were put in the window and filled with flowers. It must be hidden away before you appreciate it. I found it in a convent outside of Salamanca some years ago. It is evi-

dently the work of some old monk who spent his life in doing this sort of thing, and is a very rare example of that kind of craftsmanship. Be very careful, Monsieur Louis, you will break the monk's heart, as well as my own, if you smash it."

"Brierley is the man you want to look out for," answered the painter, bending closer over the precious object. "He'll be borrowing it to mix high-balls in unless you keep the cabinet locked."

"Monsieur Brierley is too good for any such sacrilege. And now please stand aside, and you, Monsieur High-Muck, will you kindly move your arm?" and he lifted the vase from the cloth and replaced it in the cabinet, adding with a shrewd glance, "You see, it is always wise to keep the most precious things hidden away, with, perhaps, only an edge peeping out to arouse your curiosity—and I have many such."

"Like a grisette's slipper below a petticoat," remarked Louis *sotto voce*.

"Quite like a grisette's slipper, my dear Monsieur Louis. What a nimble wit is yours! Only, take an old man's advice and don't be too curious."

Every one roared, Louis louder than any one, and when quiet reigned once more Herbert, who was determined to keep the talk along the lines which would most interest our landlord, and who had examined the chalice with the greatest interest, said, pointing to the cabinet:

"And now show us something else. Here I have lived with these things for weeks at a time and yet am only beginning to find them out. What else have you that is especially rare?"

Lemois, who had just closed the door of the cabinet, turned and began searching the room before replying.

"Well, there is my bas-relief, my Madonna. It is just behind you—very beautiful and very rare. I do not lock it up; I keep it in a dark corner where the cross-lights from the window can bring out the face in strong relief. Please do me the favor, gentlemen, to leave your seats. I never take it from its place," and he crossed the room and stood beneath it. "This is the only one in existence, so far as I know—that is, the only replica. The original is in the Sistine Chapel, near Ravenna. Bring a candle, please, Monsieur Brierley, so

we can all enjoy it. See how beautiful is the Madonna's face—it is very seldom that so lovely a smile has lived in marble—and the tenderness of the mother suggested in the poise of the head as it bends over the Child. I never look at it without a twinge of my conscience, for it is the only thing in this room which I made off with without letting any one know I had it, but I was young then and a freebooter like Monsieur Herbert's man Goringe. I did penance for years afterward by putting a few lira in the poor-box whenever I was in Italy, and I often come in here and say my prayers, standing reverently before her, begging her forgiveness; and she always gives it—that is, she *must*—for the smile has never, during all these years, faded from her face."

"But this is plaster," remarked Herbert, reaching up and passing his skilled fingers over the caste. "Very well done, too."

"Yes—of course. I helped make the mould myself from the original marble built into the altar—and in the night too, when I had to feel my way about. I am glad you think it is so good."

"Couldn't do it better myself. But why in the night?"

"Ah—that is a long story."

Herbert clapped his hands to command attention.

"Everybody take their seats. Monsieur Lemois is going to tell us of how he burglarized a church and made off with a Madonna."

Louis walked solemnly toward the door, his hand over his heart.

"You must excuse me, Herbert, if I leave the room before Lemois begins," he said, turning and facing the group, "for I should certainly interrupt his recital. This whole discussion is so repulsive to me, and so far below my own high standard of what is right and wrong, that my morals are in danger of being undermined. And I——"

"Dry up, Louis!" growled Brierley. "Go on, Lemois."

"No, I mean what I say," protested Louis. "Only a few nights ago, and at this very table, a most worthy woman, descendant of one of the oldest families in France, and our guest, confessed to wilful perjury, and now a former mayor of this village admits that he robbed a church. I have not been brought up this way, and if——"

"Tie him to a chair, High-Muck!" cried

Herbert. "No, his hands are up! All right, go on, Lemois."

"Our landlord drew nearer to the table, sat down, and, with a humorous nod toward Louis, began:

"You must all remember I was an impressionable young fellow at the time, full of daredevil, romantic ideas, and, like most young fellows, saw only the end in view without caring a sou about the means by which I reached it.

"I found the bas-relief, as I have told you, in a small chapel outside of Ravenna—one of those deep-toned interiors lighted by dust-begrimed windows, the roof supported by rows of marble columns. The altar, which was low and of simple design, was placed at the top of a wide flight of three rose-marble steps over which swung a huge brass lamp burning a ruby light. With the exception of an old woman asleep on her knees before a figure of the Virgin, I was the only person in the building. I had already seen dozens of such interiors, all more or less alike, and after walking around it once or twice was about to leave by a side door protected by a heavy clay-soiled red curtain when my eye fell on the original of the caste above you, the figures and surrounding panel

being built into the masonry of the altar, a position it had occupied, no doubt, since the days of Michael Angelo.

"For half an hour I stood before it—worshipping it, really. The longer I looked the more I wanted something to take away with me that would keep it alive in my memory. I drew a little, of course, and had my sketch-book filled, student-like, with bits of architecture, peasants, horses, and things I came across every day; but I knew I could never reproduce the angelic smile on the Madonna's face, and that was the one thing that made it greater than all the bas-reliefs I had seen in all my wanderings. Then it suddenly occurred to me —there being no photographs in those days: none you could buy of a thing like this—that perhaps I could get some one in the village to make a caste, the Italians being experts at this work. While I was leaning over the rose-marble rail drinking it in, a door opened somewhere behind the altar and an old priest came slowly toward me.

"'It is very lovely, holy father,' I said, in an effort to open up a conversation which might lead somewhere.

"'Yes!' he replied curtly; 'but love it on your knees.'

"So down I got, and there I stayed until he had finished his prayer at one of the side chapels and had left the church by the main door.

"All this time I was measuring it with my eye—its width, thickness, the depth of the cutting, how much plaster it would take, how large a bag it would require in which to carry it away. This done I went back to Ravenna and started to look up some one of the image vendors who haunt the door of the great church.

"But none of them would listen. It would take at least an hour before the plaster would be dry enough to come away from the marble. The priests—poor as some of them were—would never consent to such a sacrilege. Without their permission detection was almost certain; so please go to the devil, illustrious signore, and do not tempt a poor man who does not wish to go to prison for twenty lira.

"This talk, let me tell you, took place in a shop up a back street, kept by a young Italian image-vendor who made casts and moulds with the assistance of his father, who was a hunchback, and an old man all rags whom I could see was listening to every word of the talk.

"That same night, about the time the lamps began to be lighted, and I had started out in

search of another mouldmaker, the old man in rags stepped out of the shadow of a wall and touched my arm.

"'I know the place, signore, and I know the Madonna. I have everything here in this bucket—at night the church is closed, but there is a side door. I will take your twenty lira. Come with me.'

"When you are twenty, you are like a hawk after its quarry—your blood boiling, your nerves keyed up, and you swoop down and get your talons in your prey without caring what happens afterward. Being also a romantic hawk, I liked immensely the idea of doing my prowling at night; there was a touch of danger in that kind of villany which daylight dispels. So off we started, the ragged man carrying the bucket holding a small bottle of olive-oil, dry plaster, and a thick sheet of modelling wax besides some tools: I with two good-sized candles and a box of matches.

"When you rob a bank at night you must, so I am told, be sure you have a duplicate key or something with which to pick the lock. When you rob an Italian church, there is no such bother—you simply push wide the door and begin feeling your way about. And it was

not, to my surprise, very dark once we got in. The ruby light in the big altar lamp helped, and so did what was left of a single candle placed on a side altar by some poor soul as part penance for unforgiven sins.

"And it did not take long once we got to work. First a coat of oil to keep the wax from sticking to the marble; then a patting and forcing of the soft stuff with thumbs, fingers, and a wooden tool into the crevices and grooves of the stone, and then a gentle pull.

"Just here my courage failed and my conscience gave a little jump like the toothache. It might have been the quick flare of the lone candle on the side altar—I had not used my own, there being light enough to see to work—or it might have been my heated imagination, but I distinctly saw on the oil-smeared face of the blessed mother an expression of such intense humiliation that I pulled out my handkerchief, and although the ragged man was calling me to hurry, and I myself heard the noise of approaching footsteps, I kept on wiping off the oil until I saw her smile once more.

"The time lost caused our undoing—or rather mine. The ragged man with the precious mould

ran out the side door which was never locked —the one he knew—I landed in the arms of a priest.

"He was bald-headed, wore sandals, and carried a lantern.

"'What are you doing here?' he asked gruffly.

"I pulled out the two candles and held them up so he could see them.

"'I came to burn these before the Madonna —the door was open and I walked in.'

"He lifted the lantern and scanned my face.

"'You are the man who was here this morning. Did you get down on your knees as I told you?'

"'Yes, holy father.'

"'Get down again while I close the church. You can light your candles by the lantern,' and he laid it on the stone pavement beside me and moved off into the gloom.

"I did everything he bade me—never was there a more devout worshipper—handed him back his lantern, and made my way out.

"At the end of the town the ragged man thrust his head over a low wall. He seemed greatly relieved, and picking up the bucket, we two started on a run for my lodgings. Before

I went to bed that night he had mixed up the dry plaster in his bucket and taken the cast. He wanted to keep the matrix, but I wouldn't have it. I did not want his dirty fingers feeling around her lovely face, and so I paid him his blood money and pounded the mould out of shape. The next morning I left Ravenna for Paris.

"You see now, messieurs, what a disreputable person I am." Here he rose from his seat and walked back to the bas-relief. "And yet, most blessed of women"—and he raised his eyes as if in prayer—"I think I would do it all over again to have you where you could always listen to my sins."

VIII

CONTAINING SEVERAL EXPERIENCES AND ADVENTURES SHOWING THE WIDE CONTRASTS IN LIFE

HOW it began I do not remember, for nothing had led up to it except, perhaps, Le Blanc's arrival for dinner half an hour late, due, so he explained, to a break in the running gear of his machine, most of which time he had spent flat on his back in the cold mud, monkey-wrench in hand, instead of in one of our warm, comfortable chairs.

No sooner was he seated at my side and his story told than we fell naturally to discussing similar moments in life when such sudden contrasts often caused us to look upon ourselves as two distinct persons having nothing in common each with the other. Lemois, whose story of the stolen Madonna the previous night had made us eager for more, described, in defence of the newly launched theory, a visit to a Swiss chalet, and the sense of comfort he felt in the warmth and coseyness of it all, as he

settled himself in bed, when just as he was dozing off a fire broke out and in less than five minutes he, with the whole family, was shivering in a snow-bank while the house burned to the ground.

"And a most uncomfortable and demoralizing change it was, messieurs—one minute in warm white sheets and the next in a blanket of cold snow. What has always remained in my mind was the rapidity with which I passed from one personality to another."

Brierley, taking up the thread, described his own sensations when, during a visit to a friend's luxurious camp in the Adirondacks, he lost his way in the forest and for three days and nights kept himself alive on moose-buds and huckleberries.

"Poor grub when you have been living on porter-house steak and lobsters from Fulton Market and peaches from South Africa. Time, however, didn't appeal to me as it did to Lemois, but hunger did, and I have never looked a huckleberry in the face since without the same queer feeling around my waistband."

Appealed to by Herbert for some experiences of my own, I told how this same realization of intense and sudden contrasts always took pos-

session of me, when, after having lived for a week on hardtack, boiled pork, and plum duff, begrimed with dust and cement, I would leave the inside of a coffer-dam and in a few hours find myself in the customary swallow-tail and white tie at a dinner of twelve, sitting among ladies in costly gowns and jewels.

"What, however, stuck out clearest in my mind," I continued, "was neither time nor what I had had to eat, but the enormous contrasts in the color scheme of my two experiences: at noon a gray sky and leaden sea, relieved by men in overalls, rusty derricks, and clouds of white steam rising from the concrete mixers; at night filmy gowns and bare shoulders rose pink in the softened light against a strong relief of the reds and greens of deep-toned tapestries and portraits in rich frames. I remember only the color."

At this Herbert lighted a fresh cigar and, with the flaming match still in hand, said quietly:

"While you men have been talking I have been going over some of my own experiences" —here he blew out the match—"and I have a great mind to tell you of one that I had years ago which made an indelible impression on me."

"Leave out your 'great mind,' Herbert," cried Louis—"we'll believe anything but that—and give us the story—that is, Le Blanc, if you will be so very good as to move your very handsome but slightly opaque head, so that I can watch the distinguished mud-dauber's face while he talks. Fire away, Herbert!"

"I was a lad of twenty at the time," resumed Herbert, pausing for a moment until the unembarrassed Le Blanc had pushed back his chair, "and for reasons which then seemed good to me ran away from home, and for two years served as common sailor aboard an English merchantman, bunking in the forecastle, eating hardtack, and doing work aloft like any of the others. I had the world before me, was strong and sturdily built, and, being a happy-hearted young fellow, was on good terms with every one of the crew except a dark, murderous-looking young Portuguese of about my own age, active as a cat, and continually quarrelling with every one. When you get a low-down Portuguese with negro blood in his veins you have reached the bottom of cunning and cruelty. I've come across several of them since—some in dress suits—and know.

"For some reason this fellow hated me as

only sailors who are forced to live together on long voyages know how to hate. My bunk was immediately over his, and when I slid out in the morning my feet had to dangle in front of his venomous face. When I crawled up at night the same thing happened. We worked side by side, got the same pay, and ate the same grub, yet I never was with him without feeling his animosity toward me.

"It was only by the merest accident that I found out why he hated me. He blurted it out in the forecastle one night after I had gone on deck, and the men told me when I dropped down the companion-way again. He hated me because I brushed my teeth! Oh!—you needn't laugh! Men have murdered each other for less. I once knew a man who picked a quarrel at the club with a diplomat because he dared to twist his mustache at the same angle as his own; and another—an Austrian colonel—who challenged a brother officer to a mortal duel for serving a certain Johannesburg when it was a well-known fact that he claimed to own every bottle of that year's vintage.

"I continued brushing my teeth, of course, and at the same time kept an eye on the Portuguese whose slurs and general ugliness at

every turn became so marked that I was convinced he was only waiting for a chance to put a knife into me. The captain, who studied his crew, was of the same opinion and instructed the first mate to look after us both and prevent any quarrel reaching a crisis.

"One night, off Cape Horn, a gale came up, and half a dozen of us were ordered aloft to furl a topsail. That's no easy job for a greenhorn; sometimes it's a pretty tough job for an old hand. The yard is generally wet and slippery, the reefers stiff as marlin-spikes, and the sail hard as a board, particularly when the wind drives it against your face. But orders were orders and up I went. Then again, I had been a fairly good gymnast when I was at school, and could throw wheels on the horizontal bars with the best of them.

"The orders had come just as we were finishing supper. As usual the Portuguese had opened on me again; this time it was my table manners, my way of treating my plate after finishing meals being to leave some of the fragments still sticking to the bottom and edge, while he wiped his clean with a crust of bread as a compliment to the cook.

"The mate had heard the last of his out-

break, and in detailing the men sent me up the port ratlines and the Portuguese up the starboard. The sail was thrashing and flopping in the wind, the vessel rolling her rails under as the squall struck her. I was so occupied with tying the reefers over the canvas and holding on at the same time to the slippery yard, that I had not noticed the Portuguese, who, with every flop of the sail, was crawling nearer to where I clung.

"He was almost on top of me when I caught sight of him sliding along the foot-stay, his eyes boring into mine with a look that made me stop short and pull myself together. One hand was around the yard, the other clutched his sheath knife. Another lunge of the ship and he would let drive and over I'd go.

"For an instant I quavered before the fellow's hungry glare, his tiger eyes fixed on mine, the knife in his hand, the sail smothering me as it flapped in my face, while below were the black sea and half-lighted deck. Were he to strike, no trace would be left of me. I was a greenhorn, and it would be supposed I had missed my hold and fallen clear of the ship.

"Bracing myself, I twisted a reefer around my wrist for better hold, determined, if he

moved an inch nearer, to kick him square in the face. But at that instant a sea broke over the starboard bow, wrenching the ship fore and aft and jerking the yards as if they had been so many tent-poles. Then came a horrible shriek, and looking down I saw the Portuguese clutching wildly at the ratlines, clear the ship's side, and strike the water head-foremost. 'Man overboard!' I yelled at the top of my lungs, slid to the deck, and ran into the arms of the first mate, who had been watching us and who had seen the whole thing.

"Some of the crew made a spring for the davits, I among them. But the mate shook his head.

"'Ain't no use lowerin',' he said. 'Besides, he ain't worth savin'.'

"That night I had to crawl over the dead man's empty berth; his pillow and quilt were just as he had left them, all tumbled and mussed, and his tin tobacco-box where he had laid it. Try as I would as I lay awake in my warm bunk and thought of him out in the sea, and my own close shave for life, I could not get rid of a certain uncanny feeling—something akin to the sensation as that of which Lemois was speaking. Only an instant's time had saved

me from the same awful plunge—his last in life. I never got over the feeling until we reached port, for his berth was left untouched and his tin tobacco-box still lay beside his pillow. Even now when a sailor or fisherman pulls out an old tin box—they are all pretty much alike—or cuts a plug with a sheath knife, it gives me a shudder."

"Served the brute right!" cried Louis. "Very good story, Herbert—a little exaggerated in parts, particularly where you were so absent-minded as to select the face of the gentleman for your murderous kick, but it's all right: *very* good story. I could freeze you all solid by an experience I had with an Apache who followed me on my way to Montmartre last week, but I won't."

"Give it to us, Louis!" cried everybody in unison.

"No!"

"Well, why not?" I demanded.

"Because he turned down the next street. I said I *could*, and I would if he'd kept on after me. Your turn, Brierley. We haven't heard from you since you kept school for crows and wild ducks and taught them how to dodge bird shot. Unhook your ear-flaps, gentlemen; the

distinguished naturalist is about to relate another one of his soul-stirring adventures—pure fiction, of course, but none the less entertaining."

Before I could reply, Lemois, who had followed the course of the discussion with the keenest interest, interrupted with a deprecating shrug of his shoulders, his fingers widened out.

"But not another bird story, if you please, Monsieur Brierley. We want something deeper and stronger. We have touched upon a great subject to-night, and have only scraped the surface."

Herbert leaned forward until he caught Lemois' eye.

"Say the rest, Lemois. You have something to tell us."

"I! No—I have nothing to tell you. My life has been too stupid. I am always either bowing to my guests or making sauces for them over Pierre's fire. I could only tell you about things of which I have *heard.* You, Monsieur Herbert, can tell us of things with which you have *lived.* I want to listen now to something we will remember, like your story of the cannibal's wife. Almost every night since you have been here I go to bed with a great song

ringing in my ears. You, Monsieur Herbert, must yourself have seen such tragedies in men's lives, when in the space of a lightning's flash their souls were stripped clean and they left naked."

Herbert played with his fork for a moment, threw it back upon the cloth, and then said in a decided tone:

"No—it is not my turn; I've talked enough to-night. Open up, Le Blanc, and give us something out of the old Latin Quartier—there were tragedies enough there."

"Only what absinthe and starvation brought—and a ring now and then on the wrong girl's finger—or none at all, as the case might have been. But you've got a story, Herbert, if you will tell it, which will send Lemois to bed with a whole orchestra sounding in his ears."

Herbert looked up.

"Which one?"

"The fever camp at Bangala."

Herbert's face became instantly grave and an expression of intense thought settled upon it. We waited, our eyes fixed upon him.

"No—I'd rather not, Le Blanc," he said slowly. "That belongs to the dead past, and it is best to leave it so."

"Tell it, Herbert," I coaxed.

"Both you and Le Blanc have heard it."

"But Lemois and the others haven't."

"Got any cannibals or barbecues in it, Herbert?" inquired Louis.

"No, just plain white man all the way through, Louis. Two of them are still alive —I and another fellow. And you really want it again, Le Blanc? Well, all right. But before I begin I must ask you to pardon my referring so often to my African experiences"—and he glanced in apology around the table—"but I was there at a most impressionable age, and they still stand out in my mind —this one in particular. You may have read of the horrors that took place at Bangala in what at the time was known as the fever camp, where some of the bravest fellows who ever entered the jungles met their deaths. Both natives and white men had succumbed, one after another, in a way that wiped out all hope.

"The remedies we had, had been used without effect, and quinine had lost its power to pull down the temperature, and each fellow knew that if he were not among those carried out feet foremost to-day, and buried so deep that the hyenas could not dig him up, it was

only a question if on the morrow his own turn did not come. A strange kind of fear had taken possession of us, sick or well, and a cold, deadening despair had crept into our hearts, so great was the mortality, and so quickly when once a man was stricken did the end come. We were hundreds of miles from civilization of any kind, unable to move our quarters unless we deserted our sick, and even then there was no healthier place within reach. And so, not knowing who would go next, we awaited the end.

"The only other white man in the country besides ourselves was a young English missionary who had taken up his quarters in a native village some two miles away, in the low, marshy lands, and who from the very day of his arrival had set to work to teach and care for the swarms of native children who literally infested the settlement. Many of these had been abandoned by their parents and would have perished but for his untiring watchfulness. When the fever broke out he, with the assistance of those of the natives whom he could bribe to help, had constructed a rude hospital into which the little people were placed. These he nursed with his own hands, and as children

under ten years of age were less liable to the disease than those who were older, and, when stricken, easier to coax back to life, his mortality list was very much less than our own.

"With our first deaths we would send for him to come up the hill and perform the last rites over the poor fellows, but, as our lists grew, we abandoned even this. Why I escaped at the time I do not know, unless it was by sheer force of will. I have always believed that the mind has such positive influence over the body that if you can keep it working you can arrest the progress of any disease—certainly long enough for the other forces of the body to come to its aid. So when I was at last bowled over and so ill that I could not stand on my feet, or even turn on my bed, I would have some one raise me to a sitting posture and then I would deliberately shave myself. The mental effort to get the beard off without cutting the skin; the determination to leave no spot untouched; the making of the lather, balancing of the razor, and propping up of the small bit of looking-glass so as to reflect my face properly, was what I have always thought really saved my life.

"What I started to tell you, however, hap-

pened before I was finally stricken and will make you think of the tales often heard of shipwrecked men who, having given up all hope at the pumps, turn in despair and break open the captain's lockers, drinking themselves into a state of bestiality. It is the coward's way of meeting death, or perhaps it means the great final protest of the physical against the spiritual—a mad defiance of the inevitable—and confirms what some of our physiologists have always maintained—that only a thin stratum of self-control divides us from something lower than the beast.

"We had buried one of our bravest and best comrades, one whose name is still held in reverence by all who knew him, and after we had laid him in the ground an orgy began, which I am ashamed to say—for I was no better than the rest—was as cowardly as it was bestial. My portable india-rubber bath-tub, being the largest vessel in the camp, was the punch-bowl, and into it was dumped every liquor we had in the place: Portuguese wine, Scotch whiskey, Bass's ale, brown stout, cognac—nothing escaped. You can imagine what followed. Those of our natives who helped themselves, after a wild outburst of savagery, soon

relapsed into a state of unconsciousness. The exhilaration of the white man lasted longer, and was followed by a fighting frenzy which filled the night with horror. Men tore their clothes from their backs and, half-naked, danced in a circle, the flickering light of the camp-fire distorting their bodies into demons. It was hell let loose!

"I have got rather a strong head, but one cup of that mixture sent my brain reeling. My fear was that my will would give way and I be tempted to drink a second dipperful and so knocked completely out. With this idea firmly in my mind, I watched my chance and escaped outside the raging circle, where I found a pool into which I plunged my head. This sobered me a little and I kept on in the darkness until I reached the edge of the hill overlooking the missionary's settlement, the shouts of the frenzied men growing fainter and fainter.

"As I sat there my brain began to clear. I noticed the dull light of the moon shrouded in a deadly fog that rose from the valley below. In its mysterious dimness the wraiths of mist and fog became processions of ghosts stealing slowly up the hill—spirits of the dead on their way to judgment. The swollen moon swim-

ming in the drowsy vapor was an evil eye from which there was no escape—searching the souls of men—mine among them—I, who had been spared death and in return had defied all the laws of decency. The cries of the forest rang in my ears, loud and insistent. The howl of a pariah dog, the hoot of an owl, became so many questions—all directed toward me—all demanding an answer for my sins. Even the hum of myriads of insects seemed concerned with me, disputing in low tones and deciding on my punishment.

"Gradually these sounds grew less insistent, and soft as a breath of air—hardly perceptible at first—there rose from the valley below, like a curl of smoke mounting into the stillness, a strain of low, sweet music, and as suddenly ceased. I bent my head, wondering whether I was dreaming. I had heard that same music, when I was a boy at home, wafted toward me from the open window of the village church. How came it here? Why sing it? Why torture me with it—who would never see home again?

"I struggled to my feet, steadied myself against a cotton-tree, and fixed my eyes on the valley below; my ears strained to catch the

first recurrent note. Again it rose on the night air, this time strong and clear, as if a company of angels were singing.

"I knew now!

"It was the hymn my friend the missionary had taught the children.

"I plunged down the hill, stumbling, falling, only to drag myself to my feet again, groping my way through the dense night fog and the tangle of undergrowth, until I reached the small stockade at the foot of the incline which circled the missionary station. Crossing this ground, I followed the path and entered a small gate. Beyond it lay a flat piece of land cleared of all underbrush, and at its extreme end the rude bamboo hut of a hospital filled with sick and dying children.

"Once more on the deadly night air rose the hymn, a note of exaltation now, calling me on —to what I knew not, nor did I care, so it would ease the grinding fear under which I had lived for weeks.

"Suddenly I came to a halt. In the faint moonlight, within a dozen yards of me, knelt the figure of a man. He was praying—his hands upraised, his face lifted—the words falling from his lips distinctly audible. I moved

nearer. Before him was a new-made grave—one he had dug himself—to cover the body of a child who had died at sunset.

"It was a moment I have never forgotten, and never want to forget.

"On the hill above me were the men I had left—a frenzied body of bestial cowards who had dishonored themselves, their race, and their God; here beside me, huddled together, a group of forest children—spawn of cannibal and savage—racked with fever, half-starved, many of them delirious, their souls rising to heaven on the wings of a song.

"And then the kneeling man himself!—his courage facing death every hour of the day—alone—no one to help—only his Maker as witness. I tell you, gentlemen, that when I stood beside him and looked into his eyes, caught the tones of his voice, and watched the movement of his fingers patting the last handfuls of earth over the poor little nameless body, and realized that his only recompense lay in that old line I used to hear so often when I was a boy—'If ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me'—I could have gone down on my knees beside him and thanked my Creator that He had sent me to him."

IX

IN WHICH MADAME LA MARQUISE BINDS UP BROKEN HEADS AND BLEEDING HEARTS

THE morning brought us two most welcome pieces of news, one being that Gaston, his head swathed in bandages, had, with the doctor's approval, gone home an hour before breakfast, and the other that our now adorable Madame la Marquise de la Caux, with Marc as gentleman-in-waiting, would arrive at the Inn some time during the day or evening, the exact hour being dependent upon her duties at the site of her "ruin." These pieces of news, being positive and without question, were received with the greatest satisfaction, Gaston's recovery meaning fresh roses in Mignon's cheeks and madame's visit giving us another glimpse of her charming personality.

That which was less positive, because immediately smothered and sent around in whispers, were rumors of certain happenings that had taken place shortly after daybreak. Mignon,

so the word ran, before seeking her little cot the night before, had caught a nod, or the lift of Leà's brow, arched over a meaning eye, or a significant smile—some sort of wireless, anyway, with Leà as chief operator, and a private wire to Louis' room, immediately over Gaston's. What she had learned had kept the girl awake half the night and sent her skipping on her toes at the break of dawn to the little passageway at the far end of the court-yard, where she had cried over Gaston and kissed him good-by, Leà being deaf and dumb and blind. All this occurred before the horrible old bogie (Lemois was the bogie), who had given strict orders that everything should be done for the comfort of the boy before he left the Inn, was fairly awake; certainly before he was out of bed.

"By thunder!—I could hardly keep the tears out of my eyes I was so sorry for her," Louis had said when he burst into my room an hour before getting-up time. "I heard the noise and thought he was suffering again and needed help, and so I hustled out and came bump up against them as they stood at the foot of the stairs. I wasn't dressed for company and dared not go back lest they should see me, and

so I flattened myself against the wall and was obliged to hear it all. I'm not going to give them away; but if any girl will love me as she does that young fellow she can have my bank account. And he was so manly and square about it all—no snivelling, no making a poor face. 'It is nothing, Mignon—I am all right. Don't cry,' he kept saying. 'Everything will come out our way in the end.' By Jove!—I wish some girl loved me like that!"

Such an expression of happiness had settled, too, on Leà's face as she brought our coffee, that Herbert caught up his sketch-book and made her stand still until he had transferred her dear old head in its white cap to paper. Then, the portrait finished—and it was exactly like her—what a flash of joy suffused Mignon's face when he called to her and whispered in her ear the wonderful tale of why he had drawn it and who was to be its proud possessor; and when it was all to take place, a bit of information that sent her out of the room and skipping across the court, her tiny black kitten at her heels.

It was, indeed, a joyous day, with every one in high good humor, culminating in the wild-

Herbert caught up his sketch-book and . . . transferred her dear old head . . . to paper

est enthusiasm when the sound of a siren, followed by the quick "chug-chug" of the stop brake of madame's motor, announced the arrival of that distinguished woman an hour ahead of time.

"Ah!—gentlemen!" she shouted out, rising from her seat, both hands extended before any of us could reach her car, "I have come over to crown you with laurel! Oh, what a magnifi- [illegible] lot of heroes!—and to think you saved my poor, miserable little mouse-trap of a villa that has been trying all its life to slide down hill into the sea and get washed and scrubbed. No, I don't want your help—I'm going to jump!" and out she came, man's ulster, black-velvet jockey cap, short skirt, high boots, and all, Marc following.

"And now, Monsieur Marc, give me a little help—no, not here—down below the seat. Careful, now! And the teakwood stand is there too—I steadied them both with my feet. There, you dear men!"—here she lifted the priceless treasure above her head, her eyes dancing—"what do you think of your punch-bowl? This is for your choicest mixtures whenever you meet, and not one of you shall have a drop out of it unless you promise to make

me honorary member of your coterie, with full permission to stay away or come just as I please. Isn't it a beauty?—and not a crack or scar on it—Old Ming, they tell me, of the first dynasty. There, dear Lemois, put it among your things, but never out of reach."

She had shaken every one's hand now and was stamping her little feet in their big men's boots to keep up her circulation, talking to us all the while.

"Ah, Monsieur Louis, it was you who carried out my beloved piano—Liszt played on it, and so did Paderewski and Livadi, and a whole lot of others, until it gave out and I sent it down here, more for its associations than anything else. And you too, Monsieur Herbert"—and she gave him a low curtsy, as befitted his rank—"you-were-a-*real-major-general*, and saved the life of that poor young fisherman; and you, Lemois, rescued my darling miniatures and my books. Yes—I have heard all about it. Oh!—it was so kind of you all—and you were so good—nothing I really loved is missing. I have been all the morning feasting my eyes on them. And now let us all go in and stir up the fire—and, please, one of you bring me a thimbleful of brandy. I have rummaged over

my precious things until I have worked myself into a perspiration, and then I must drive like Jehu until I get chilled to the bone. Catch cold!—my dear Monsieur Brierley—I never catch cold! I should be quite ashamed of myself if I did."

We were inside the Marmouset now, Marc unbuttoning her outer garments, revealing her plump, penguin-shaped body clothed in a blouse of mouse-colored corduroy with a short skirt to match, her customary red silk scarf about her throat; the silver watch with its leather strap, which hung from the pocket of her blouse, her only ornament.

"Take my cap, please," and she handed it to the ever-obsequious Marc, who always seemed to have lost his wits and identity in her presence. This done, she ran her fingers through her fluff of gray hair, caught it in a twist with her hand, skewered it with a tortoise-shell pin, and, with a "So! that's all over," drew up a chair to the blaze and settled herself in it, talking all the time, the men crowding about her to catch her every word.

"And now how about that young fisherman? Thank you, Monsieur Herbert. No, that is quite enough; a thimbleful of cognac is just

what I need—more than that I have given up these many years. Come!—the young fisherman, Lemois. Is he badly hurt? Has he a doctor? How long before he gets well? Can I go to see him as soon as I get warm? Such a brave lad—and all to save my miserable jim-cracks."

Both of Lemois' hands were outstretched in a low bow. "We could do no less than rescue your curios, madame. Our only fear is that we may have left behind something more precious than anything we saved."

"No, I have not missed a single thing; and it wouldn't make any difference if I had; we love too many things, anyway, for our good. As to the house—it is too funny to see it. I laughed until I quite lost my breath. Everything is sticking out like the quills on a mad hedgehog, and the porch steps are smashed flat up against the ceiling. Oh!—it is too ridiculous! Just fancy, only the shelf in my boudoir is left where it used to be, and the plants are still blooming away up in the air as if nothing had happened. But not a word more of all this!" and she rose from her seat. "Take me to see the poor fellow at once!"

Again Lemois bowed, this time with the

greatest deference. The exalted rank of his guest was a fact he never lost sight of.

"He is not here, madame," he said in an apologetic tone; "I have sent him home to his mother."

"Home!—to his mother?—and after my despatch. Oh!—but I could take so much better care of him here! Why did you do it?"

"For the best of reasons—first, because the doctor said he might go, and then because I"—and he lowered his voice and glanced around to see if Mignon had by any chance slipped into the room—"because," he added with a knowing smile, "it is sometimes dangerous to have so good-looking a fellow about."

"So good of you, Lemois," she flashed back; "so thoughtful and considerate. Twenty years ago I might have lost my heart, but——"

"Oh, but, madame—I never for an instant—" He was really frightened.

"Oh, it was not *me*, then!" and one of her ringing, silvery laughs gladdened the room. "Who, then, pray?—certainly not that dear old woman with the white cap who— Oh!—I see!—it is that pretty little Norman maid. Such a winning creature, and so modest. Yes, I remember her distinctly. But why should not

these two people love each other? He is brave, and you say he is handsome—what better can the girl have?"

Lemois shrugged his shoulders in a helpless way, but with an expression on his obstinate face that showed his entire satisfaction with his own course.

Madame read his thoughts and turned upon him, a dominating ring in her voice. "And you really mean, Lemois, that you are playing jailer, and shutting up two hearts in different cells?"

Lemois, suddenly nonplussed, hesitated and looked away. We held our breaths for his answer.

"Ah, madame," he replied at last slowly, all the fight knocked out of him, "it is not best that we discuss it. Better let me know what madame la marquise will have for dinner—we have waited all day until your wishes were known."

"Nothing—not a crumb of anything until I find out about these lovers. Did you ever know anything like it, gentlemen? Here on one side are broken heads and broken hearts —on the other, a charming old gentleman whom I have known for years, and whom I

love dearly, playing bear and ready to eat up both of these young turtle doves. When I remonstrate he wants to know whether I will have my chicken roasted on a spit or *en casserole!* Oh, you are too silly, Lemois!"

"But she is like my daughter, madame," replied Lemois humbly, and yet with a certain dignity.

"And, therefore, she mustn't marry an honest young fisherman. Is that what you mean?"

Lemois merely inclined his head.

"And pray what would you make of her—a countess?"

A grim baffled smile ruffled the edges of the old man's lips as he tried again to turn the conversation, but she would not listen.

"No, I see it all! You want some flat-chested apothecary, or some fat clerk, or a notary, or a grocer, or— Oh, I know all about it! Now do you go and get your dinner ready—anything will suit me—and when it is over and Monsieur Herbert is firmly settled in his big chair, with the funny heads listening to everything we say, I am going to tell you a story about one of your mismated marriages, and I want you to listen, Monsieur Bear, with your terrible growl and your great claws and

your ugly teeth. No, I won't take any apologies," and another laugh—a whole chime of silver bells this time—rang through the room.

"What a pity it is," she continued after her opponent had left the room, "that people who get old forget so soon what their own youth has meant to them. He takes this child, puts a soul into her by his kindness, and then, when she becomes a woman, builds a fence around her—not for her protection but for his own pride. It will be so much more *honorable*, he says to himself, for the great house of Lemois to have one of his distinguished waifs *honorably* settled in an *honorable* home," and she lifted her shoulders ever so slightly. "Not a word, you will please note, about the girl or what *she* wants—nothing whatever of that kind. And he is such a dear too. But I won't have it, and I'm going to tell him so!" she added, her brown eyes blazing as her heart went out once more to the girl.

All through the dinner the marquise made no further reference to the love affair, although I could see that it was still on her mind, for when Mignon entered and began moving about the room in her demure, gentle way, her lids

lowered, her pretty head and throat aglow in the softened light, I saw that she was following her every gesture. Once, when the girl replenished her plate, the woman of birth, as if by accident, laid her fingers on the serving-woman's wrist, and then there flashed out of her eyes one of those sympathetic glances which only a tender-hearted woman can give, and which only another woman, no matter how humble her station, can fully understand. It was all done so quickly and so deftly that I alone noticed it, as well as the answering look in Mignon's eyes: full of such gratitude and reverence that I started lest she should betray herself and thus spoil it all.

With the coffee and cigarettes—madame refusing any brand but her own—"I dry every bit of my tobacco myself," she offered in explanation, "and roll every cigarette I smoke" —we settled ourselves in pleased expectation, Herbert, as usual, in the Florentine; our guest of honor beside a small table which Lemois had moved up for her comfort, and on which he had placed a box of matches and an ash-tray; Brierley stretched out on the sofa with a cushion at his back; Lemois on a low stool by the fire; Louis and I with chairs drawn

close. Even the big back log, which had been crooning a song of the woods all the evening, ceased its hum as if to listen, while overhead long wraiths of tobacco smoke drifted silently, dimming the glint and sparkle of copper, brass, and silver that looked down at us from the walls.

"And now, madame," said Herbert with a smile, when both Leà and Mignon had at last left the room, "you were good enough to say you had a story for us."

"No," she answered gayly. "It is not for you. It is for our dear Lemois here," and she shook her head at him in mock reproval. "You are all too fine and splendid, every one of you. You keep houses from tumbling to pieces and rescue lovers and do no end of beauteous things. He goes about cutting and slashing heads and hearts, and never cares whom he hurts."

Lemois rose from his seat, put his hand on his shirt-front—a favorite gesture of his—bowed humbly, and sat down again.

"Yes, I mean it," she cried with a toss of her head, "and I have just been telling these gentlemen that I am going to put a stop to it just as soon as I can find out whether this young hero with the broken head is worth the saving, and that I shall decide the moment I get my

eyes on him. Pass me my coffee, Lemois, and give me my full share of sugar—three lumps if you please—and put four into your own to sweeten your temper, for you will need them all before I get through.

"The story I promised you is one of sheer stupidity, and always enrages me when I think of it. I have all my life set my face against this idiotic custom of my country of choosing wives and husbands for other people. In any walk of life it is a mistake; in some walks of life it is a crime. This particular instance occurred some twenty years ago in a little village near Beaumont, where I lived as a girl. Outside our far gate, leading to the best fields, was the house of a peasant who had made some thousands of francs by buying calves when they were very small, fattening them, and driving them to the great markets. He was big and coarse, with a red face, small, shrewd eyes, and a bull neck that showed puffy above his collar. He was loud, too, in his talk and could be heard above every one else in the crowd when the auction sales were being held in the market. But for his blue blouse, which reached to his feet, he might have been taken for one of his own steers.

"The wife was different. Although she was of the same peasant stock, a strain of gentleness and refinement had somehow crept in. In everything she was his opposite—a short woman with narrow shoulders and small waist; a low, soft voice, and a temper so kindly and even that her neighbors loved her as much as they hated her husband. And then there was a daughter—no sons—just one daughter. With her my acquaintance with the family began, and but for this girl I should have known nothing of what I am going to tell you.

"It all came about through a little fête my father gave to which the neighbors and some of the land-owners were invited. You know all about these festivities, of course. Something of the kind must be done every year, and my dear father never forgot what he owed his people, and always did his best to make them happy. On this occasion the idea came into my head that it would be something of a novelty if I arranged a dance of the young people with a May-pole and garlands, after one of the Watteau paintings in our home; something that had never been done before, but which, if done at all, must be carried out properly. So I sent to Paris to get the costumes,

the wide hats, petticoats, and all—with the small clothes for the men—and started out to find my characters. One of my maids had told me of this girl and, as she lived nearest, I stopped at her house first. Well, the father came in and blustered out a welcome; then the mother, with a curtsy and a smile, wiped out the man's odious impression, thanking me for coming, and then the girl appeared—the living counterpart of her mother except that the fine strain of gentle blood had so softened and strengthened the daughter's personality that she had blossomed into a lovely young person without a trace of the peasant about her—just as any new grafting improves both flower and fruit. I could not take my eyes from her, she was so gentle and modest—her glance reaching mine timidly, the lids trembling like a butterfly afraid to alight; oh, a very charming and lovely creature—an astonishing creature, really, to be the daughter of such a man. Before the visit was over I had determined to make her my prima donna: she should lead the procession, and open the dance with some gallant of her choice—a promise received with delight by the family; the girl being particularly pleased, especially with the

last part of it, and so I left them, and kept on my rounds through the village and outlying district.

"It was a lovely summer day—in June, if I remember—too late for May-poles, but I didn't care—and long before the hour arrived our lawn was thronged with peasants and their sons and daughters, and our stables and paddocks crowded with their carts and vehicles. My father had provided a tent where the young people should change their clothes, but I took my little maid up into my own room, and my femme de chambre and I dressed her at our leisure.

"It is astonishing what you find underneath the rough garments worn by some of our peasants. I have often heard one of my friends—a figure painter—express the same surprise over his models. What appears in coarse cloth to be an ill-shaped arm turns out to be beautifully modelled when bared to the overhead light of a studio. So it was with this girl. She had the dearest, trimmest little figure, her shoulders temptingly dimpled, her throat and neck with that exquisite modelling only seen in a beautifully formed girl just bursting into womanhood. And then, too, her hair—what a

lot of it there was when it was all combed out, and of so rich a brown, with a thread of gold here and there where the light struck it; and, more than all, her deep sapphire-blue eyes. Oh!—you cannot think how lovely they were; eyes that drank you all in until you were lost in their depths—like a well holding and refreshing you.

"So we dressed her up—leghorn hat, petticoats, tiny slippers on her tiny feet—and they were tiny—even to her shepherdess crook—until she looked as if she had just stepped out of one of Watteau's canvases.

"And you may be sure she had her innings! The young fellows went wild over her, as well as the older ones—and even some of our own gentry tried to make love to her—so I heard next day. When all was ready she picked out her own partner, as I had promised she should, a straight, well-built, honest-faced young peasant whom she called 'Henri'—a year or two her senior, and whom I learned was the son of a poor farmer whose land adjoined her father's, but whose flocks and herds consisted of but one cow and a few pigs. In his pearl-gray short clothes and jacket, slashed sleeves, and low-cut shoes he looked amazingly well, and I did

not blame her for her choice. Indeed she could not have done better, perfectly matched as they were in their borrowed plumes.

"And now comes a curious thing: so puffed up was that big animal of a father over the impression the girl had made, and so proud was he over the offers he received shortly after for her hand—among them a fellow herdsman twenty years her senior—that he immediately began to put on airs of distinction. A man with such a daughter, he said to himself, was also a man of weight and prominence in the community; he, therefore, had certain duties to perform. This was his only child; moreover, was he not rich, being the owner of more than a hundred head of cattle, and did he not have money in the banks? Loyette—have I told you her name was Loyette?—Loyette should marry no one of the young fellows about her—he had other and higher views for her. What these views were nobody knew, but one thing was certain, and that was that Henri, whom she loved with all her heart, and who had danced with her around the May-pole, was forbidden the house. The excuse was that his people were not of her class; that they were poor, his father being . . . Oh, the same

stupid story which has been told thousands of times and will continue to be told as long as there are big, thick-necked fathers who lay down the law with their sledge-hammer fists, and ambitious old gentlemen"—here she cut her eye at Lemois—"who try to wheedle you with their flimsy arguments—arguments which they would have thrown in your face had you tried it on them when they themselves were young. The father forgot, of course—just as they all forget—that she was precisely the same young girl with precisely the same heart before the fête as she was after it; that every rag on her back I had given her; that her triumph was purely a matter of chance—my going first to his house and thus finding her—and that on the very next day she had milked the cows and polished the tins just as she had done since she was old enough to help her mother.

"Again that old story was repeated: the mother begged and pleaded; the girl drowned herself in tears, but the father stormed on. Poor Henri continued to peep over the fence at Loyette when she went milking, or met her clandestinely on the path behind the cow sheds, and everybody was wretched for months trying to make water run uphill.

"Then Loyette confided in me. I had started to walk to the village and she had seen me cross the broad road and had followed. Poor child!—I can see her now, the tears streaming down her cheeks as she poured out her heart: how she and Henri had always loved each other; how fine and brave and truthful he was, and how kind and noble: she emptying her heart of her most precious secret—the story of her first love—a story, gentlemen"—here the marquise's voice dropped into tones of infinite sweetness—"which the angels bend their ears to catch, for there is nothing more holy nor more sublime.

"I listened, her hand in mine—we were about the same age and I could, therefore, the better understand—her pretty blue eyes like wet violets searching for my own—and when her story was all told, I comforted her as best I could, telling her what I firmly believed—that no father with a spark of tenderness in his heart could be obdurate for long and not to worry—true love like hers always winning its way—whereupon she dried her eyes, kissed my hand, and I left her.

"What happened I do not know, for I went to Paris shortly after and was married myself,

and did not return to my old home for some years. Then one day, in the effort to pick up once more the threads of my old life, there suddenly popped into my mind Loyette's love story. I sent at once for one of the old servants who had lived with us since before I was born.

"'And Loyette—the girl with the big ugly father—did he relent and did she marry the young fellow she was in love with?'

"'No, madame,' she answered sadly, with a shake of the head; 'she married the cattleman, Marceaux, and a sad mess they made of it, for he was old enough then to be her father, and he is now half paralyzed, and goes around in a chair on wheels, and there are no children—and Loyette, who was so pretty and so happy, must follow him about like a dog tied to a blind man, and she never laughs the whole livelong day. That was her father's work—he made her do it, and now she must pay the price.'

"'And what became of the pig of a father?' I had hated him before; I loathed him now.

"'Dead; so is her mother.'

"'And the young fellow?'

"'He had to do his service, and was gone three years, and when he came back it was too late.'

"'Well, but why did she give in?'

"'Don't they all have to give in at last? Did the husband not settle the farm on her, and fifty head of cattle, and the pasturage and barns? Is not that better for an only daughter than digging in the fields bending over washing-boards all day and breaking your back hanging out the clothes? How did she know he would be only a sick child in a chair on wheels—and this a year after marriage?'

"'And what did the young fellow do?'

"'What could he do? It was all over when he came back. And now he never laughs any more, and will look at none of the women—and it is a pity, for he is prosperous and can well take care of a wife.'

"I had it all now, just as plain as day; they had tricked the girl into a marriage; had maligned the young fellow in the same cowardly way, and had embittered them both for life. It was the same old game; I had seen it played a hundred times in different parts of the world. Often the cards are stacked. Sometimes it is a jewel—or a handful of them—or lands—or rank—or some other such make-believe. This trick is to be expected in the great world where success in life is a game, and where each gam-

bler must look to the cards—but not here among our peasantry"—and again she shot her glance at Lemois—"where a girl grows up as innocent as a heifer, her nature expanding, her only ambition being to find a true mate who will help her bear the burdens her station lays upon her.

"I resolved to see her for myself. If I had been wrong in my surmises—and it were true that so sweet and innocent a creature had of her own free will married a man twenty years her senior when her heart was wholly another's —I should lose faith in girl nature: and I have looked into many young hearts in my time. That her father—big brute as he was—would have dared force her into such an alliance without her consent I did not believe, for the mother would then have risen up. These Norman peasants fight for their children as a bear fights for her cubs—women of the right kind—and she was one.

"My own father shrugged his shoulders when I sought his counsel, and uttered the customary man-like remark: 'Better for her, I expect, than hoeing beets. All she has to do now is to see him comfortably fixed in his chair—a great blessing, come to think of it,

for she can always find him when she wants him.'

"This view of the case brought me no relief, and so the next day I mounted my horse, took my groom, and learning that her cripple of a husband had bought another and a larger farm a few kilometres away, rode over to see her.

"I shall never forget what I found. Life presents some curious spectacles, and the ironies of fate work out the unexpected. In front of the low door of a Norman farm-house of the better class sat a gray-haired, shrivelled man with a blanket across his knees—his face of that dirty, ash-colored hue which denotes disease and constant pain. My coming made some stir, for he had seen me making my way through the orchard and had recognized my groom, and at his call the wife ran out to welcome me. My young beauty was now a thin, utterly disheartened, and worn-out woman who looked twice her age, and on whose face was stamped the hall-mark of suffering and sorrow. The brown-gold hair, the white teeth, and deep-blue eyes were there, but everything else was a wreck.

"When the horses were led away, and I had

expressed my sympathy for the cripple, I drew her inside the house, shut the door, and took a chair beside her.

"'Now tell me the whole story—not your suffering, nor his—I see that in your faces—but how it could all happen. The last time you talked to me we were girls together—we are girls now.'

"'Madame la marquise,' she began, 'I——'

"'No, not madame la marquise,' I interrupted, taking her hand in mine; 'just one woman talking to another. Whose fault was it—yours or Henri's?'

"'Neither. They lied about him; they said he would never come back; then, when he did not write and no news came of him and I was wild and crazy with grief, they told me more things of which I won't speak; and one of the old women in the village, who wanted him for her granddaughter, laughed and said the things were true and that she didn't mind, and nobody else should; and then all the time my father was saying I must marry the other'—and she pointed in the direction of the cripple—'and he kept coming every day, and was kind and sympathetic, and good to me I must say, and is now, and at last my heart was worn

out—and they took me to the church, and it was all over. And then the next month Henri came back from Algiers, where he had been ill in the hospital, and came straight here and sat down in that chair over there, and looked about him, and then he said: "I would not have come home if I had known how things were; I would rather have been shot. I cannot give you all this"—and he pointed to the furniture—"and you did not want them when we first loved each other."

"'And then he told me how many times he had written, and we hunted through my father's chest which I had brought here with me—he had died that year, and so had my dear mother—and there we found all Henri's letters tied together with a string, and not one of them opened.'

"'What did you do?' I asked.

"'I went at once to my husband and told him everything. He burst into a great rage; and the two had hard words, and then the next day he was out in the field and the sun was very hot, and he was brought home, and has been as you see him ever since.'

"'And where is Henri?'

"'He is here on the farm. When the doc-

tor gave my husband no hope of ever being well again, my husband sent for him and begged Henri's pardon for what he had said, saying he wanted no one to hate him now that he could not live; that all Henri had done was to love me as a man should love a woman, and that, if I would be willing, Henri should take care of the farm and keep it for me. This was four years ago, and Henri is still here and my husband has never changed. When the weather is good, Henri puts him in his chair, the one we bought in Rouen, and wheels him about under the apple-trees, and every night he comes in and sits beside him and goes over the accounts and tells him of the day's work. Then he goes back home, six kilometres away, to his mother's, where he lives.'"

Madame la marquise paused and shook the ashes from her cigarette, her head on one side, her eyes half-closed, a thoughtful, wholly absorbed expression on her face. Lemois, who had listened to every word of the strange narrative, his gaze fastened upon her, made no sound, nor did he move.

"And now listen to the rest: Two years later the poor cripple passed away and the next spring the two were married. The last

time she came to me she brought her child with her—a baby in arms—but the dazzling light of young motherhood did not shine in her eyes—the baby had come, and she was glad, but that was all. They are both alive to-day, sitting in the twilight—their youth gone; robbed of the joy of making the first nest, together—meeting life second-hand, as it were—content to be alive and to be left alone.

"As for me, knowing the whole story, I had only a deep, bitter, intense sense of outrage. I still have it whenever I think of her wrongs. God is over all and pardons us almost every sin we commit—even without our asking, I sometimes think—but the men and women who for pride's sake rob a young girl of a true and honorable love have shut themselves out of heaven."

X

IN WHICH WE ENTERTAIN A JAIL-BIRD

WHAT effect madame's story had made upon Lemois became at once an absorbing question. He had listened intently with deferential inclination of the head, and when she had finished had risen from his seat and thanked her calmly with evident sincerity, but whether he was merely paying a tribute to her rare skill—and she told her story extremely well, and with such rapid changes of tones and gestures that every situation and character stood out in relief—or because he was grateful for a new point of view in Mignon's case, was still a mystery to us. While she was being bundled up by Herbert and Louis for her ride home, Marc had delivered himself of the opinion that Mignon would have her lover in the end; that nothing madame had ever tried to do had failed when once she set her heart and mind to work, and that the banns might as well be published at once. But, then,

Marc would have begun to set nets for larks and bought both toaster and broiler had the same idol of his imagination predicted an immediate fall of the skies. That his inamorata was twenty years his senior made no difference to the distinguished impressionist; that Marc was twenty years her junior made not the slightest difference to madame—nor did Marc himself, for that matter. All good men were comrades to her—and Marc was one: further she never went. Her rule of life was freedom of thought and action, and absolute deference to her whims, however daring and foolish.

Nor did the marquise herself enlighten us further as to what she thought of Mignon's love affairs or Lemois' narrow matrimonial views. She had become suddenly intent on having the smashed villa pulled uphill and set on its legs again, with Marc as adviser and Le Blanc's friend, The Architect, as director-in-chief—an appointment which blew into thin air that gentleman's determination to put into dramatic form the new Robinson Crusoe of which Herbert had told us, with Goringe, the explorer, as star, the lady remarking sententiously that she had definite reasons for the restoration and

wanted the work to begin at once and to continue with all possible speed.

This last Le Blanc told us the next day when he returned in madame's motor, bringing with him an old friend of his—a tall, sunburned, grizzly bearded man of fifty, with overhanging eyebrows shading piercing brown eyes, firm, well-buttressed nose, a mouth like a ruled line—so straight was it—and a jaw which used up one-third of his face. When they entered Herbert was standing with his back to the room. An instant later the stranger had him firmly by the hand.

"I heard you were here, Herbert," he cried joyously, "but could hardly believe it. By Jove! It's good to see you again! When was the last time, old man?—Borneo, wasn't it?—in that old shack outside the town, and those devils howling for all they were worth."

Introductions over, he dropped into a chair, took a pipe from his pocket, and in a few minutes was as much a part of the coterie as if we had known him all his life: his credentials of accomplishment, of pluck, of self-sacrifice, of endurance and skill were accepted at sight; the hearty welcome he gave Herbert, and the way his eyes shone with the joy of meeting

him, completing the last and most important requirement on our list—good-fellowship. That he had lived outside the restrictions of civilization was noticeable in his clothes, which were of an ancient cut and looked as if they had just been pulled out of a trunk where they had lain in creases for years, which was true, for during the past decade he had been acting Engineer-in-Chief of one section of the great dam on the Nile, and was now home on leave. He had, he told us, left London the week before, had crossed with his car at Dieppe, and was making a run down the coast by way of Trouville when he bumped into Le Blanc and, hearing Herbert was within reach, had made bold to drop in upon us.

When Mignon and Leà had cleared the table, dinner being over, and the coffee had been served—and somehow the real talk always began after the coffee—for then Lemois was with us—Herbert looked at The Engineer long and searchingly, a covetous light growing in his eyes—the look of a housed sailor sniffing the brine on a comrade's reefer just in from the sea—and said dryly:

"Are you glad to get home?"

"Yes and no. My liver had begun to give

out and they sent me to England for a few months, but I shall have to go back, I'm afraid, before my time is up. Gets on my nerves here —too much sand on the axles—too much friction and noise—such a lot of people, too, chasing bubbles. Seems queer when you've been away from it as long as I have. How do you stand it, old man?"

Herbert tapped the table-cloth absently with the handle of his knife and remarked slowly:

"I don't stand it. I lie down and let it roll over me. If I ever thought about it at all I'd lose my grip. Sometimes a longing to be again in the jungle sweeps over me—to feel its dangers—its security—its genuineness and freedom from all shams, if you will"—and a strange haunting look settled in his eyes.

"But you always used to dream of getting home; I've lain awake by the hour and heard you talk."

"Yes, I know," he answered rousing himself, "it was a battle even in those days. I would think about it and then decide to stay a year or two longer; and then the hunger for home would come upon me again and I'd begin to shape things so I could get back to England. Sometimes it took a year to decide—sometimes

two or three—for you can't get rid of that kind of a nightmare in a minute."

"You were different from me, Herbert," remarked Le Blanc. "You went to the wilds because you loved them; I went because they locked the front and back gates on me. I suppose I deserved it, for nobody got much sleep when I was twenty. But it sounds funny to have you say it would take you two years to make up your mind whether you'd come home or not. It wouldn't have taken me five seconds."

"Sometimes it didn't take that long," and a quick laugh escaped Herbert's lips as if to conceal his serious mood. "Those things depend on how you feel and what has started your thinking apparatus to working. I walked out of a kraal in Australia one summer's night when the home-hunger was on me and never stopped until I reached Sydney—the last hundred miles barefoot. You must have known about it, for I met you right after"—and he turned to The Engineer, who nodded in an amused way. "That was before we struck Borneo, if I remember?"

"Why barefooted, Herbert?" asked Louis, hitching his chair the closer.

"Because the soles and heels were gone and the uppers were all that were left."

"Tell them about it, Herbert," remarked The Engineer with a smile, pulling away at his pipe.

"Oh, if you would, Monsieur Herbert! I tried to tell Monsieur High-Muck about it the night you arrived, but Monsieur Louis' horn put it out of my head. It is better that he hears it from you"—and the old man's lip quivered, his face lighting up with admiration. Herbert was his high-priest in matters of this kind.

"There is really nothing to tell," returned Herbert. "I was tending cattle for a herdsman at the time up in the hills—I and a friend of mine. We had both run away from our ships and were trying the rolling country for a change, when one of those irresistible, overwhelming attacks of homesickness seized me, and without caring a picayune what became of me, I turned short on my tracks and struck out for the coast. A man does that sort of thing sometimes. I had no money and only the clothes on my back, but I knew the railroad was some forty miles away, and that when I reached it I could work my passage into civilization and from there on to London.

"The weather was warm and I slept in a cow shack when I found one, and in the bushes when they got scarce. Finally I reached the railroad. I had never tried stealing a ride, sleeping on the trucks, hiding in freight cars, and being put off time and again until the next town was reached—I had never tried it because it had never been necessary, and then I hated that sort of thing. But I had no objection to asking for a lift, telling the agent or conductor the whole story, and I did it regularly at every station I passed on foot, only to get the customary oath or jeering laugh. After I had walked about sixty miles I came upon a water station known as Merton, with a goods train standing by. This time I asked for a ride on the tender. The engineer met my request with a vacant stare—never taking his pipe from his mouth. The fireman was a different sort of man. He not only listened to my story, but handed me part of the contents of his dinner pail wrapped up in a newspaper—which I was glad to get, and told him so. Before the train had gone fifty yards she was side-tracked for orders—which gave me another chance to get at the fireman. 'I may lose my job if I do,' he said, 'but I've been up against

it myself; come around a little later; it'll be dark soon and something may turn up.'

"Something did turn up. While the engineer was oiling under his engine I got a wink from the fireman, climbed on the tender, crept beneath a tarpaulin, and rooted down in the coal. There, tired out, I fell asleep. I was awakened by the whistle of the locomotive, and then came the slow wheeze of the cylinder head, and we were off. Sleeping on a hard plank under a car going thirty miles an hour is a spring mattress to lying in a pile of coal with lumps as big as your head grinding into your back. Now and then the fireman—not my particular friend, but a man who had replaced him as I discovered when we whizzed past the light of a station—would ram his shovel within reach of my ribs—just missing me. But I didn't mind—every mile meant that much nearer home and less tramping in the heat and dust to get there. If I could manage to keep hidden until we reached Sydney I should gain one hundred—maybe two hundred—miles before morning.

"About midnight we came to a halt, followed by a lot of backing and filling—shunting here and there. The safety-valve was thrown wide

open, or the exhaust, or something else, and suddenly the steam went out of her. Then came a dead silence—not a sound of any kind. Sore as I was—and every bone in my body ached—I wrenched myself loose, lifted the edge of the tarpaulin, and peeped out. The engine and tender were backed up against a building which looked like a round-house; not a soul was in sight. I slid to the ground and began to peer around. After a moment I caught the swing of a lantern and heard the steps of a man. It was a watchman going his rounds.

"'Warm night,' he hollered when he came abreast of me. He evidently took me for a fireman, and I didn't blame him, for I was black as soot—clothes, face, hands, and hair.

"'Yes,' I said, and stopped. It wouldn't do to undeceive him. Then I remembered the name of the station where I had boarded the tender. 'Been hot all the way from Merton. How far is that from Sydney?'

"'Oh, a devil of a way!' He lifted his lantern and held it to my face. 'Say, you ain't no fireman—you're a hobo, ain't ye?'

"I nodded.

"'And you're p'inted for Sydney? Well, it serves ye right for stealin' a ride; you're

eighty-two miles further away than when ye started. That locomotive is a special and got return orders.'"

The Engineer threw back his head and roared.

"Yes, that's it, Herbert. I remember just how you looked when we ran against each other in Sydney."

"Not barefooted, were you, old fellow?" remarked Louis in a sympathetic tone. "That was tough."

"Barefooted? Not much!" exclaimed The Engineer. "He was quite a nob. That's why I made up to him; he was so much better dressed than I. And do you know, Herbert, I never heard a word of you from that time on until I struck one of your statues in the Royal Academy the other day. I never thought you'd turn out sculptor with medals and things. Thought you wanted more room to swing around in. This is something new, isn't it?"

Herbert took his freshly lighted cigar from his mouth long enough to say, "About as new as your building dams. You were trying to get into the real-estate business when I bid you good-by in Sydney. Did it work?"

"No, I got into jail instead."

Everybody stared.

"What was it all about?" asked Herbert, unperturbed.

"Stealing!"

"*Stealing!*" exclaimed Le Blanc.

"Yes. That was about it," he answered. "Only this time I tried to bag a government and got locked up for my pains. One of your countrymen"—and he nodded toward me—"was mixed up in it. By the way"—and he rose from his chair—"you don't mind my taking this candle, do you?—I've been looking at something in that cabinet over there all the evening and I can't stand it any longer. I may be wrong, but they look awfully like it."

He had reached the carved triptych, and was holding the flame of the candle within a few inches of a group of tiny figures—some of Lemois' most precious carvings—one the figure of a man with a gun.

"Just as I thought. Prison work, isn't it, Monsieur Lemois? Yes—of course it is—I see the tool marks. Made of soup bones. Oh, very good indeed—best I have ever seen. Where did you get this?"

"They were made by the French prisoners in Moscow," answered Lemois, who had also

risen from his seat and was now standing beside him. "But how did you know?" he asked in astonishment. "Most of my visitors, if they look at them at all, think they are Chinese."

"Because no one, if he can get ivory, makes a thing like this of bone"—and he held it up to our gaze—"and everybody out of jail who has this skill *can* get ivory. I've made a lot myself—never as fine as these—this man must have been an expert. I used to keep from going crazy by doing this sort of thing—that and the old dodge of taming fleas so they'd eat out of my hand. What a pile of good stuff you have here—regular museum"—and with a searching, comprehensive glance he replaced the candle and regained his chair.

I bent forward and touched his elbow.

"We've entertained all sorts of people here," I said with a laugh, "but I think this is the first time we have ever had an out-and-out ticket-of-leave man. Do you mind telling us how it happened?"

"No; but it wouldn't interest you. Just one of those fool scrapes a fellow gets into when he is chucked out neck and heels into the world."

Brierley drew his chair closer—so did Louis and Le Blanc.

Herbert glanced toward his friend. "Let them have it, old man. We promise not to set the dogs on you."

"Thanks. But it wouldn't be the first time. Well, all right if it won't bore you. Now let me think"—and he lifted his weather-bronzed face, made richer by the glow of the candles overhead, and began scratching his grizzly beard with his forefinger.

"It was after you left Borneo, Herbert, that I came across two fellows—Englishmen—who told me of some new gold diggings on the west coast, and I was fool enough to join them, working my passage on one of the home-going tramp steamers. Well, we thrashed about for six months and landed on one of the small islands in the Caribbean Sea—the name of which I forget—where we left the ship and hid until she disappeared. The gold fever was well out of us by that time, and, besides, I had gotten tired of scrubbing decks and my two fellow tramps of washing dishes. The port was a regular coaling station and some other craft would come along; if not, we could stay where we were. The climate was warm, bananas were

cheap and plenty; we were entirely fit, and—like many another lot of young chaps out for a lark—did not care a tinker's continental what happened. That, if you think about it, is the high-water mark of happiness—to be perfectly well, strong, twenty-five years of age, and ready for anything that bobs up.

"This time it was a small schooner with a crew of about one hundred men, instead of the customary ten or twelve. A third of them came ashore, bought provisions and water, and were about to shove off to the vessel again, when one of my comrades recognized the mate as an old friend. He offered to take us with them, and in half an hour we had gathered together our duds and had pushed off with the others. The following week we ran into a sheltered cove, where we began landing our cargo. Then it all came out: we were loaded to the scuppers with old muskets in cases, some thousand rounds of ammunition, and two small, muzzle-loading field-guns. There was a revolution in Boccador—one of the small South American republics—they have them every year or so—and we were part of the insurgent navy! If we were caught we were shot; if we got a new flag on top of Government House in the capital

of San Josepho, we would have a plantation apiece and negroes enough to run it. It sounded pleasant, didn't it?

"I'm not going into all the details—it's the story of the jail you want, not the revolution. Well, we had two weeks of tramping up to our waists in the swamps; three days of fighting, in which one of the field-guns blew off its nose, killing the mate; and the next thing I knew, my two companions and I were looking down the muzzles of a dozen rifles held within three feet of our heads. That ended it and we were marched into town and locked up in the common jail—and rightly named, I tell you, for a filthier or more deadly hole I never got into. It was a square, two-story building—all four sides to the town—with a patio, or court, in the centre. Outside was a line of sentries and inside were more sentries and a couple of big dogs.

"They put us on the ground floor with a murderous-looking chap for guard. As the place was packed with prisoners, we three were shoved into one cell. Every morning at daylight one or two—once six—poor devils were led out; the big gate was opened, and then there would come a rattling of rifle-shots, and when the six

came back they were on planks with sheets over them. All this we could see by standing on each other's shoulders and looking over the grating.

"Our turn came the morning of the seventh day. The door was unlocked and we were ordered to fall in. But we didn't go through the big outer gate; we were led to a door across the yard and into a bare room where another murderous-looking chap, in a dirty uniform with shoulder-straps and a sword, sat at a table. On either side of him were two more ruffians, one with an inkstand. Not a man Friday of them spoke anything but Spanish. When we were pushed in front of his highness in shoulder-straps, he looked us over keenly and began whispering to the man with the ink. Then to my surprise—and before either I or my two friends—one of whom spoke a little Spanish—could utter a protest—right-about-face, and we were hustled back into our cell and locked up again.

"For three days and nights the usual jail things happened: We had two meals a day—bone soup and a hunk of mouldy bread; the guard tramped in the dust outside our cell, while at night another took his place—the dogs

prowling or sniffing at the crack of our door; at daylight the rifle-shots!

"We had started to work for our release by that time, and by persistent begging got a sheet of paper, and, with the help of my companion, I wrote a letter to 'his Excellenza,' as the guard called his nibs, informing him that we were English tourists who had taken passage for sheer love of adventure, and demanding that our case be brought to the attention of the English consul.

"One week passed and then a second before we were informed by the head jailer that there *was* no English consul, and that if there had been it would have made no difference, as we had been taken with arms in our hands, and that but for some inquiries put on foot by his Excellenza we would have been shot long ago.

"So the hours and days dragged on and we had about started in to make our wills when, one morning after our slop coffee had been pushed in to us, the bolts were slid back and the nattiest-looking young fellow you ever laid your eyes on stepped inside. He was about twenty-four, was dressed from head to foot in a suit of white duck, and looked as if he had just cleared the deck of the royal yacht. With

him were two slovenly looking functionaries, one of whom carried a note-book. The young fellow eyed us all three, sizing us up with the air of a man accustomed to that sort of thing, and said with an air of authority:

"'I am the American consul. Your communication was brought to me because your government is not represented here. You're in a bad fix, but I'll help you out if I can. Now tell me all about it.'

"Tell him about it! Why, we nearly fell on his neck, and before he left he had our whole story in his head and a lot of our letters and cards in his clothes. They might be of use, he said, in proving that we had not, by any means, started out to undermine his Supreme Highness's government. But that under fear of death—and he winked meaningly—we had been compelled to take up arms against the most illustrious republic of Boccador.

"Nine long, weary months passed after this and not another human being crossed our threshold except the head jailer. When we bombarded him with questions about the fellow who had passed himself off as the American consul, and who had stolen our letters and had never shown up since—damn him!—we

had all learned to speak a little Spanish by this time—he pretended not to hear and, his inspection over, locked the door behind him. Pretty soon we fell into the ways of all disheartened prisoners—each man following the bent of his nature. I warded off sickening despair by carving with my pocket-knife—which they let me keep as being too small to do them any harm—little figures out of the beef bones I found in my soup. That's how I came to recognize those in Monsieur Lemois' cabinet. When I was lucky enough to get hold of a knuckle bone with a rounded knob at the end, I made a friar with a bald head, the smooth knob answering for his pate. Other bones were turned into grotesque figures of men, women, and animals. These I gave to the sentry, who sent them to his children. Often he brought me small pieces of calico and I made dresses and trousers for them. When I got tired of that I trained two fleas—and they were plenty—to play leap-frog up my arm.

"When these little diversions failed to drive dull care away, we passed the time cursing the gentleman in the immaculate cotton ducks. He had either lied to us, or was dead, or had

been transferred—anyway, he had gone back on us and left us to rot in jail.

"At last we determined to escape.

"We had made that same resolution every day for months and had planned out half a dozen schemes, some of which might have been successful but for two difficulties—the double guard on the outside of the building and the two dogs in the jail-yard. There was now but one chance of success. We would dig a hole in the dirt floor clear under the wall, watch for a stormy night, and make a break for the town and the coast, where we might be able to signal some trading craft and so get away.

"So we started to digging, beginning on the side opposite the door—our utensils being a sharpened bone, my pocket-knife, and a bayonet which had dropped from a sentry's scabbard, and which I managed to pick up on our exercise walk in the court-yard and conceal in the straw on which we slept. This straw too helped hide the dirt. We rammed the wisps up into each end of the pallets, put the excavated earth in the middle with a dusting of loose straw over it, and so hid our work from view. At the end of a month we had a hole under the wall large enough to wriggle in. I

could see the daylight through the loose earth on the other side. Then we waited for a storm, the rainy season being on and thunder showers frequent. Two, three, four nights went by without a cloud; then it began to pour. We determined to try it just before the guards were changed. This was at 2 A. M. by the church clock. The outgoing sentry would be tired then and the new man not thoroughly awake.

"When the hour came I crawled in head first, worked myself to the end of the tunnel, and, putting out my hands to break away the remaining clods of earth, came bump up against a piece of heavy board. There I lay trembling. The board could never have rolled down from anywhere, nor could our opening have been detected from the outside.

"Somebody had placed it there on purpose!

"I wriggled back feet foremost, whispered in my companions' ears what I had found, and we all three sat up the rest of the night wondering what the devil it meant. When morning broke, the head jailer came in. I noticed instantly a change in his manner. Instead of a few perfunctory questions, he gave a cursory glance around the cell, his eyes resting on the pile of

straw, and turning short on his heel left without a word.

"There was no question now but we were suspected, so we held a council of war and determined to keep quiet—at least for some nights. What was up we didn't know, but at all events it was best to go slow. So we stuffed most of the dirt back in the hole and waited—our ears open to every sound, our teeth chattering. You get pretty nervous in jail—especially when you have about made up your mind that the next hour is your last.

"We didn't wait long.

"That afternoon the bolts were slid back and the head jailer, who had never before appeared at that hour, stood in the doorway.

"I thought right away that it was all over with us; that we were discovered and that we were either to be shot or moved to another cell —I really didn't care which, for instant death could not be much worse than lingering in a South American prison until we were gray-bearded and forgotten.

"The jailer stepped inside, half closed the door, and made this announcement:

"'The American consul is outside and wants to see you.' Then he stepped out, leaving the door open.

"They have a way of coaxing you to escape down in that country and then filling you full of lead. It's justifiable murder when sometimes a trial and conviction might raise unpleasant international questions. We all three looked at each other and instantly decided not to swallow the bait. The American consul dodge had been tried when they wanted to get legal possession of our letters. So it isn't surprising that we didn't believe him. Then, to my astonishment, I caught through the crack of the door a suit of white duck, and the natty young man stepped in.

"'I've been down the coast,' he began as chipper as if he was apologizing for not having called after we had invited him to dinner, 'or I should have been here before. I have a permit from the governor to come as often as I like, or as often as you would be glad to see me. I must tell you, however, that I am pledged to keep faith with the authorities, and it is their confidence in me which has gained me this privilege. I can bring you nothing to eat or drink, no tools or knickknacks or any bodily comforts. I can only bring myself. This I have told his Excellenza, who has his orders, and who understands.' Then he turned to the jailer. 'Get me a stool and I will stay a while

with them. You can leave the door open; I will be responsible that none of them attempts to escape.'

"When the jailer was out of hearing, he passed around cigarettes, lighted his own, and started in to tell us the news of the day: what was going on in town and country; how the revolution had been put down; how many insurgents had been shot, exiled, or sent to horrible prisons—worse than ours, which, he informed us, was really only a sort of police station and unsafe except for the dogs and the guards, who were picked men and who had never been known to neglect their duty. Only the year before five men had attempted to dig their way out and had been shot as they were climbing the outside wall—rather dispiriting talk for us, to say the least, but it was talk, and that was what we hungered for, especially as his spirits never flagged.

"All this was more or less entertaining, and he would have had our entire confidence but for two things which followed, and which we could not understand. One was that he always chose rainy or stormy nights for his subsequent visits, dropping in on us at all hours, when we least expected him; and the other that he never re-

ferred to what was being done for our release. That he would not discuss.

"By and by we began to grow uneasy and suspect him. One of the men insisted that he was too damned polite to be honest, and that the American consul yarn was a put-up job. Anyway, he was getting tired of it all. It would take him but half an hour to dig the loose earth out of the tunnel, and he was going to begin right away if he went at it alone.

"We at once fell to, working like beavers, digging with everything we had—our fingers bleeding—until we had cleaned out the dirt to the plank. Then we crawled back and waited for the consul's customary visit. After that was over—no matter how long it lasted—we'd make the dash.

"He came on the minute; and this time, to our intense disgust, brought his guitar—said he thought we might like a little music—and without so much as by-your-leave opened up with negro melodies and native songs, the instrument resting in the hollow of his knee, one leg crooked over the other, a cigarette stuck tight to his lower lip.

"Hour after hour went by and still he sang on—French, German, Italian—anything and

everything—rolling out the songs as if we had been so many classmates at a college supper. Charming, of course, had we not had a hole behind us and freedom within sight.

"Hints, yawns, even blunt proposals to let us go to bed, had no effect. Further than these we dared not go. We were afraid to turn him out bodily lest we should be suspected of trying to get rid of him for a purpose. To have let him into the secret was also out of the question. Better wait until he was gone.

"Would you believe it, he never left until broad daybreak, his confounded irritating cheerfulness keeping up to the last, even to his tossing his fingers to us in good-by, quite as he might have done to his sweetheart.

"At eight o'clock on that same morning, not more than two hours after he had left, there came a bang at the door with a sword-hilt, the bolts were drawn, and we were marched into the court-yard between five soldiers in command of a sergeant. Then came the orders to fall in, and we were pushed into the same room where, nearly a year before, we had been examined by the ruffian in shoulder-straps and sent back to our cell.

"And here I must say that, for the first time since our capture, I lost all hope. Five men for three of us, and two of the cartridges blank!

"The squad closed in and we were lined up in front of a table before another black-haired, greasy, villanous-looking reptile who read the death-warrant, as near as I could make out—he spoke so fast. Then he rose from his seat, bowed stiffly, and left the room. Next the sergeant saluted us, ordered his men to fall in, and left the room. Then the jailer stepped forward, shook our hands all around, and left the room.

"We were free!

"Outside, in the broad glare of the scorching sun, his boyish face in a broad grin, stood the consul, looking as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox.

"'I am sorry you found me such a bore last night,' he said, gay and debonair as an old beau at a wedding, 'but there was nothing else to do. If I'd gone home earlier and let you crawl out of that hole, you would have been shot to a dead certainty. I knew a month ago you were at work on it, and when it was nearly finished I got permission to drop in on you. The plank that you ran up

against I had put there with the help of the jailer. It was meant to keep you quiet until my mail got in. I was helpless, of course, to assist you until it did, being my government's representative. It arrived yesterday, informing me that our State Department has taken up your cases with your government and has entered a formal protest. Now all of you come over to the consulate, and let me see what I can do to fix you out with some clothes and things.

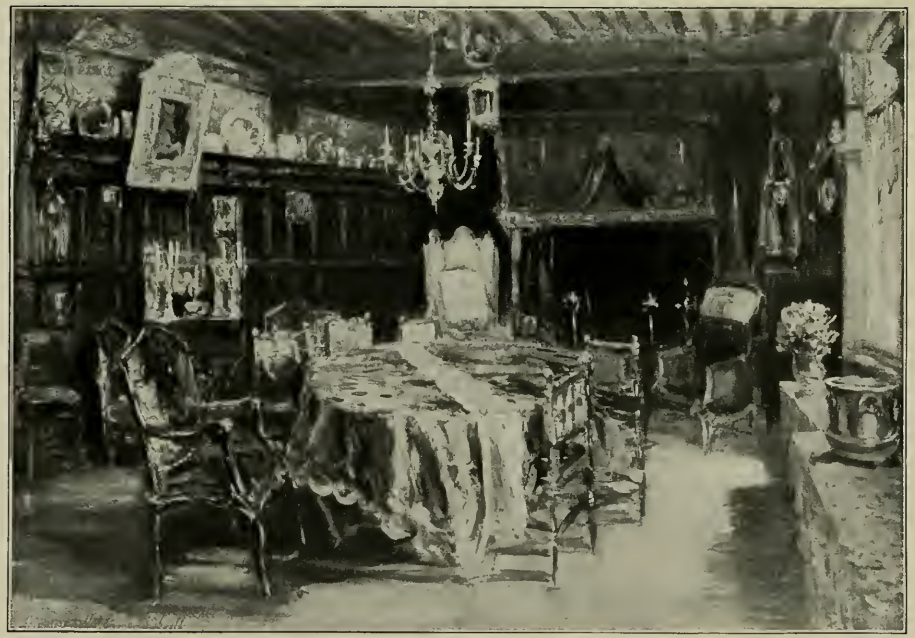
"'After that we'll have breakfast.'"

XI

IN WHICH THE HABITS OF CERTAIN GHOSTS, GOBLINS, BANDITS, AND OTHER OBJECTIONABLE PERSONS ARE DULY SET FORTH

THE Engineer's story whetted every one's appetite for more. Lemois, hoping to further inspire him, left his chair, crossed the room, and began searching through the old fifteenth-century triptych to find some object of interest which would start him to talking again as entertainingly as had the carved soup bones from the Moscow prison. When he re-occupied his seat he held in his hand a small statuette in terra-cotta. This he placed on the table where the light fell full upon it.

"You overlooked this, I am afraid," he said, addressing The Engineer. "It is one of the most precious things I own. It is a portrait of Madame de Rabutin-Chantal, the grandmother of Madame de Sévigné." The Sévigné family were a favorite topic with the old gentleman, and anything pertaining to them of



Lemois crossed the room and began searching through the old fifteenth-century triptych

peculiar interest to him. "You will note, I am sure, Monsieur Herbert, the marvellous carving especially in the dress and about the neck."

Before Herbert could answer, Louis craned his head and a disgusted look overspread his face. "I hope," he said, "she didn't look like that, Lemois—squatty old party with a snub nose."

Herbert, ignoring Louis' aside, reached over and took the little image in his fingers.

"Squatty or not, Louis, it is an exquisite bit—modern Tanagra, really. Seventeenth century, isn't it, Lemois?"

Lemois nodded. If he had heard Louis' remark he gave no sign of the fact.

"Yes," continued Herbert, "and wonderfully modelled. We can't do these things now—not in this way"—and he passed it to The Engineer, who turned it upsidedown, as if it were a teacup, glanced at the bottom in search of its mark, and without a word handed it back.

Lemois replaced the precious object in the triptych, his mind still filled with his favorite topic, and, turning suddenly, wheeled a richly upholstered chair from a far corner into the light.

"And here is another relic of Madame Sé-

vigné, monsieur. This is madame's own chair; the one she always used when she stopped here, sometimes for days at a time, on her way to her country-seat, Les Rochers. The room which she occupied, and in which she wrote many of her famous letters, is just over our heads. If monsieur will shift his seat a little he can see the very spot in which she sat."

But The Engineer neither shifted his seat nor rose to the bait. None of the small things of past ages appealed to him. Even mummies and the spoil of coffins three thousand years old—and he had inspected many of them—failed to stir him. It was what was built over them, and the brains and power that hoisted the stones into place, as well as the forces of wind and water—the song of the creaking crane—those were the things that thrilled him. That Herbert, after his career in the open, had contented himself with a few tools and a mass of clay was what had most surprised him when he came upon his statues in the Royal Academy.

So he kept silent until what Louis called the "bric-à-brac moment" had passed—such discussion often occurring whenever Lemois felt he had a new audience. Gradually the talk drifted into other channels. Mistaken identity

and the injustice of convictions on circumstantial evidence were gone into, The Engineer recalling some of his own errors in dealing with his men in Egypt. At this Le Blanc, wandering slightly from the main topic, gave an account of a mysterious woman in white who on certain nights when the moon was bright used to descend the wide staircase of a French château which he often visited, the apparition being the ghost of a beautiful countess who had been walled up somewhere below stairs by a jealous husband, and who took this mode of publishing her wrongs to the world. Le Blanc had seen her himself, first at the head of the great staircase and then as she crept slowly down the steps and disappeared through the solid wall to the left of the baronial fireplace. His hostess, who affected not to believe in such uncanny mysteries, tried to persuade him it was merely a shaft of moonlight stencilled on the white wall, but Le Blanc scouted the explanation and was ready to affirm on his word of honor that she looked at him out of her great, round, beseeching eyes, and would, he felt assured, have spoken to him had not one of the servants opened a door at the moment and so scared her away.

I told of a somewhat similar experience in which a strong-minded Englishwoman, who laughed at ghosts and all other forms of unsavory back numbers, and a bishop of distinction were mixed up. There was a haunted room in the Devonshire country house that no one dared occupy. Another white figure prowled here, but whether man or woman, no one knew. That it was quite six feet high and broad in proportion, and had at various times scared the wits out of several nervous and semi-hysterical females who had passed the night between the sheets, all agreed. As it was the week-end, there were a goodly number of visitors and the house more or less crowded. When the haunted room was mentioned, even the bishop demurred—preferring to take the one across the corridor—he being a frequent visitor and knowing the lay of the land. The strong-minded young woman, however, jumped at the chance. She had all her life been hoping to see a ghost and, in order to allow his or her ghostship free entrance, had left the door of the haunted room unlocked when she got into bed. Despite her screwed-up courage she began to get nervous, and when she heard the door creak on its hinges and felt the cold, clammy

air of the corridor on her cheek, she slid down off her pillow and ducked her head under the sheet. Then, to her horror, she felt the blanket slowly slipping away and, peering out, was frozen stiff to see a tall figure, dressed in white, standing at the foot of her bed, its long, skinny fingers clutching at the covering. Without even a groan she passed promptly into a fit of unconsciousness, known as a dead faint, where, with only a sheet over her, she lay until the cold woke her. She left by the early coach and believes to this day that she would have been strangled had she offered the slightest protest. Nor did her hostess's letter, covering a full explanation, satisfy her. "It was not a ghost you saw, my dear, but the bishop, who wanted an extra blanket, and who jumped out of bed in search of one, and into your room, thinking it empty. It's a mercy you didn't scream, for then the situation could never have been explained—better say nothing about it, or, if you do—stick to its being a ghost."

While these and other yarns were sent spinning around the table, Louis had cut in, of course, with all sorts of asides—some whispers behind his hand to his next neighbor—some squibs of criticism exploded without rhyme or

reason in our midst—all jolly and diverting, but nothing approaching a story short or long.

My own and Herbert's efforts to draw him out into something sustained brought only—"Don't know any yarns" and "Never had anything happen to me"—followed at last by—"The only time I was ever in a tight place was when I was sketching in Perugia; then I jumped through the window and took most of the sash with me."

"Let's have it!" we all cried in one breath. No one was so lively and entertaining once we got him started.

"That's all there is to it. They had locked the door on me—three of them—and when the back of the chair gave out—I was swinging it around my head—I made a break for out-of-doors."

"Oh! — go on — go on, Louis!" came the chorus.

"No, I'd rather listen to you men. I haven't been tattooed in the South Seas, nor half murdered rounding Cape Horn. I'm just a plain painter, and my experience is limited, and my three Perugian villains were just three dirty Italians, one of whom was the landlord who had charged me five prices for my meal, and

tried to hold me up until I paid it—only a vulgar brawl, don't you see? The landlord had his head in splints when I passed him the next day."

"You were lucky to escape," said The Engineer. "They have a way of knifing you while you are asleep. I had a friend who just got out of one of those Italian dives with his life."

"Yes, that was why I was swinging the chair. Hard for any three men to get at you if its legs and back hold out. Of course a fellow can sneak up behind you with a knife and then you— By Jingo!—come to think of it, I *can* tell you a story! It just popped into my head. You have brought it all back"—and he nodded to our guest—"about the closest shave—so I thought at the time—that I ever had in my life. Your ghost stories don't hold a candle to it—stealthy assassin—intended victim sound asleep—miraculous escape!—Oh! a blood-curdler!—I was scared blue."

Everybody shifted their chairs and craned their heads to watch Louis' face the better, overjoyed that he had at last wakened up. Louis scared blue—and he a match for any five men—meant a tale worth hearing.

"It was the summer I made those studies of mountain brooks flowing out of the glaciers—you remember them, Herbert? Anyway, I was across the Swiss border, and in a ragged Italian town dumped down on the side of a hill as if it had been spilt from a cart—one of those sprawled-out towns with a white candle of a campanile overtopping the heap. The diligence, about sunup, had dropped me at the exact spot with my traps, and was hardly out of sight before I had started to work, and I kept it up all day, pegging away like mad, as I always do when a subject takes hold of me—and this particular mountain brook was choking the life out of me, with lots of deep greens and transparent browns all through it, and the creamy froth of a glass of beer floating on the top.

"When the sun began to sink down behind the mountains I realized that it was about time to find a place to sleep. I was at work on a 40 x 30—rather large for out-doors—and, as it would take me several days, I had arranged with a goatherd—who lived in a slant with stones enough on its roof to keep it from being blown into space—to let me store my wet canvas and my palette and box under its

supports. I'd have bunked in with the goats if I'd had anything to cover me from the cold —and it gets pretty cold there at night. Then again I knew from experience that a goatherd's sour bread and raw onions were not filling at any price. What I really wanted was two rooms in some private house, or over a wineshop or village store, with a good bed and a place where I could work in bad weather. I had found just such a place the summer before, on the Swiss side of the mountains, belonging to an old woman who kept a cheap grocery and who gave me for a franc a day her two upper rooms—and mighty comfortable rooms they were, and with a good north light. So I hung the wet canvas where the goats couldn't lick off my undertones, shouldered my knapsack, and started downhill to the village.

"I found that the red-tiled houses followed a tangle of streets, no two of them straight, but all twisting in and out with an eye on the campanile, and so I struck into the crookedest, wormed my way around back stoops, water barrels, and stone walls with a ripening pumpkin here and there lolling over their edges, and reached the church porch just as the bell was ringing for vespers. When you want to

get any information in an Italian village, you go to the priest, and if he is out, or busy, or checking off some poor devil's sins—and he has plenty of it to do—then hunt up the sacristan.

"There must have been an extra load of peccadilloes on hand that night, for I didn't find his reverence, nor the sacristan, nor anybody connected with the church. What I did find was a chap squatting against one side of the door with a tray on his lap filled with little medals and rosaries—and a most picturesque-looking chap he was. His feet were tied up in raw hides; his head bound in a red cotton handkerchief, over which was smashed a broad-brimmed sombrero; his waist was gripped with another to match; his lank body squeezed into a shrunken blue jacket, and his shambly legs wobbled about in yellow breeches. The sombrero shaded two cunning, monkey eyes, a hooked nose, a wavering mouth, and a beard a week old. It was his smile, though, that tickled my funny-bone, and this happened when he held up the tray for my inspection—one of those creepy, oily smiles that spread slowly over his dirty, soapy face, like the swirl of oil and turpentine which floats over a basin of suds when you wash your brushes.

"Not a very inviting person;—a loafer, a lazzaroni, a dead-beat of a dago, really—and yet my heart warmed to him all the same when he answered me with enough French sandwiched between his 'o's' and 'i's' to help out my bad Italian. What finally trickled from his wrinkled lips was the disappointing announcement that no hostelry at all worthy of the Distinguished Signore existed in the village, nor was there money enough in the place for any one of the inhabitants to have a surplus of anything—rooms especially—but there was—here the oily smile overran the soap-suddy face—a most excellent casino kept by an equally excellent citizen where travellers were wont to stay overnight; that it was up a back street—they were all 'back' so far as I had seen—and that, if the Distinguished Signore would permit, he would curtail the sale of his religious relics long enough to conduct his D. S. to the very door.

"So we started, the vendor of 'helps to piety' ahead and I following behind, my knapsack over my shoulder. I soon discovered that if the casino was up a back street he was going a long way round to reach it. First he dived into an alley behind the mouldy, plaster-pock-

marked church—the candle-stick of the campanile—ducked under an archway—'*sotto portico*,' he called it—opened out into a field, struck across a little bridge into another street—hardly a soul about, nothing alive—nothing except dogs and children—all of which he explained was a short cut. For some time his dodging made no impression on me; then the way he rounded the corners and hugged the shadowed side of the street, away from the few dim lamps, set me to wondering as to his intentions. What the devil did he mean by picking out these blind alleys? He must have seen that I was no tenderfoot or tourist who had lost his way.

"With this I began to fix certain landmarks in my memory in case I had to make my way back alone. There was no question now in my mind as to the town's character. Half the murders and hold-ups in the large cities are concocted in these villages, and this had rascality stamped all over it. Every corner I turned looked more forbidding than the last—every street seemed to end in a trap—the kind of street a scene-painter tries to produce when he has a murder up a back alley to provide for the third act. And crooked!—well, the tracks of a

bunch of fishworms crawling out from under a brick were straight compared to it. When I at last protested—for I was getting ravenous and I must say a trifle uneasy—the beggar bowed low enough for me to see the tail of his jacket over his sombrero, and gave as a reason that any other route would have greatly fatigued the signore, all of which he must have known was a lie. The fact was that if I had known how to get out of the tangle, I would have lifted him by the scruff of his neck and the slack of his trousers and dropped him into the first convenient hole.

"When he did come to a halt I found myself before a low two-story ruin of a house—almost the last house in the village, and on the opposite edge from that which I had entered on my way to the church. It was evidently a common road house, the customary portico covered with grape-vines and a square room on the ground floor, containing one or more tables. In the rear, so I discovered later, was a dreary yard corralling a few scraggly trees—one overhanging a slanting shed under which the cooking was done—and below this tree an assortment of chairs and tables under an arbor, where a bottle of wine and a bit of cheese or

bunch of grapes were served when the sun was hot.

"It was now quite dark, and my guide had some difficulty in getting his fingers on the latch of the garden gate. When it swung open I followed up a short path and found myself in a square room which was lighted by a single lamp. Under this sat another oily Italian, in his shirt-sleeves, eating from an earthen bowl. Not a picturesque-looking chap at all, but a fat, swarthy lump of a man with small, restless eyes, stub nose, and flabby lips—one of those fellows you think is fast asleep until you catch him studying you from under his eyebrows, and begin to look out for his knife. The only other occupant of the room was a woman who was filling his glass from a straw-covered flask—a thin, flat-bosomed woman who stooped when she walked, and who sneaked a glance at me now and then from one side of her nose. I might better have slept in the slant and bunked in with the goats.

"My guide bent down and whispered a word in his ear; the man jumped up—looked me all over—a boring, sizing-up look—like a farmer guessing the weight of a steer—bowed grandiloquently, and with an upward flourish of his

hand put his house, his fortune, and his future happiness at my feet. There were bread and wine, and cheese and grapes; and there were also eggs, and it might be a slice of pork. As for chicken—he would regret to his dying day that none was within his reach. Would I take my repast in the house at the adjoining table, or would I have a lamp lighted in the arbor and eat under the trees?

"I preferred the lamp, of course, under the trees; picked up the flask of wine, poured out a glass for my guide, which he drank at a gulp, and handed him a franc for his trouble. The woman gave a sidelong glance at the coin and followed him out into the garden; there the two stood whispering. On her return, while she passed close enough to me to graze my arm, she never once raised her eyes, but kept her face averted until she had hidden herself in the kitchen.

"I had selected the garden for two reasons: I wanted the air and I wanted to know something more of my surroundings. What I saw —and I could see now the more clearly, for the moon had risen over the mountain—were two rear windows on the second floor, their sills level with the sloping shed, and a tree with its

branches curved over its roof. This meant ventilation and a view of the mountains at sunrise—always a delight to me. It also meant an easy escape out the window, over the roof, and down the tree-trunk to the garden, and so on back to the goatherd if anything unusual should happen. That, however, could take care of itself. The sensible thing to do was to eat my supper, order my coffee to be ready at six o'clock, go to bed in one of these rear rooms, and get back to my work before the heat became intense.

"All this was carried out—that is, the first part of it. I had the rear room, the one I had picked out for myself, not by my choice but by his, the landlord selecting it for me; it would be cooler, he said, and then I could sleep with my window open, free from the dust which sometimes blew in the front windows when the wind rose—and it was rising now, as the signore could hear. Yes, I should be called at six, and my coffee would be ready —and 'may the good God watch over your slumbers, most Distinguished of Excellencies.'

"This comforting information was imparted as I followed him up a break-neck stair and down a long, narrow corridor, ending in a small

hall flanked by two bedroom doors. The first was mine—and so was the candle which he now placed in my hand—and 'will your Excellency be careful to see that it is properly blown out before your Excellency falls asleep?' and so I bade him good-night, pushed in the door, held the sputtering candle high above my head, and began to look around.

"It wouldn't have filled your soul with joy. Had I not been tired out with my day's work I would have called him back, read the riot act, and made him move in some comforts. The only things which could be considered furniture were a heavy oaken chest and a solid wooden bed—a box of a bed with a filling of feathers supporting two hard pillows. And that was every blessed thing the room contained except a toy pitcher and basin decorating the top of the chest; a white cotton curtain stretched across the lower sash of the single window; a nail for my towel, a row of wooden pegs for my clothes, and a square of looking-glass which once had the measles. Not a chair of any kind, no table, no wash-stand. This was a place in which to sleep, not sit nor idle in. Off with your clothes and into bed—and no growling.

"I walked to the open window, pushed aside the cotton curtain, and looked out on the sloping shed and overhanging tree, and the garden below, all clear and distinct in the light of the moon. I could see now that the tree had either prematurely lost its leaves or was stone dead. The branches, too, were bent as if in pain.

"The correct drawing of trees, especially of their limbs and twig ends, has always been a fad of mine, and the twistings of this old scrag were so unusual, and the tree itself so gnarled and ugly, that I let my imagination loose, wondering whether, like the villagers, it was suffering from some unconfessed sin, and whether fear of the future and the final bonfire, which overtakes most of us sooner or later, was not the cause of its writhings. With this I blew out the candle and crawled into bed, where I lay thinking over the events of the evening and laughing at myself for being such a first-class ass until I fell asleep.

"How long I slept I do not know, but when I woke it was with a start, all my faculties about me. What I heard was the sound of steps on the shed outside my window—creaking, stealthy steps as of a man's weight bending the supports of the flimsy shed. I raised myself

cautiously on my elbow and looked about me. The square of moonlight which had patterned the floor when I first entered the room was gone, although the moon was still shining. This showed me that I had slept some time. I noticed, too, that the wind had risen, although very little seemed to penetrate the apartment, the curtains only flopping gently in the draught.

"I lay motionless, hardly breathing. Had I heard aright—or was it a dream? Again came the stealthy tread, and then *the shadow of a hand* crept across the curtain. This sent me sitting bolt upright in bed. There was no question now—some deviltry was in the air.

"I slid from under the cover, dropped to the floor, flattened myself to the matting, worked my body to the window-sill, and stood listening. He must have heard me, for there came a sudden halt and a quick retreat. Then all was silent.

"I waited for some minutes, reached up with one hand and gently lowered the sash a foot or more, leaving room enough for me to throw it up and spring out, but not room enough for him to slide in without giving me warning. If the brute tried it again I would paste myself to the wall next the sash where I could see him,

and he not see me, and as he ducked his head to crawl in I'd hit him with all my might; that would put him to sleep long enough for me to dress, catch up my traps, and get away.

"Again the step and the shadow. This time he stopped before he reached the window-sill. He had evidently noticed the difference in the height of the sash. Then followed a hurried retreating footstep on the roof. I craned my head an inch or more to see how big he was, but I was too late—he had evidently dropped to the garden below.

"I remained glued to the window-jamb and waited. I'd watch now for his head when he pulled himself up on the roof. If it were the lumpy landlord, the best plan was to plant the flat of my boot in the pit of his stomach—that would double him up like a bent pillow. If it was the brigand with the rosaries, or some of his cut-throat friends, I would try something else. I had no question now that I had been enticed here for the express purpose of doing me up while I was asleep. The mysterious way in which I had been piloted proved it; so did my guide's evident anxiety to avoid being seen by any of the inhabitants. Then there bobbed up in my mind the cool, sizing-up glance of the

landlord as he looked me over. This clinched my suspicions. I was in for a scrap and a lively one. If there were two of them, I'd give them both barrels straight from the shoulder; if there were three or more, I'd fight my way out with a chair, as I had done at Perugia.

"With this I came to a sudden halt and moved to the middle of the room. There I stood, straining my eyes in the dim light, hoping to find something with which to brain the gang should they come in a bunch. I took hold of the bed and shook it—the posts and back were as solid as a cart body. The chest was worse—neither of them could be whirled around my head as a club, as I had used the chair at Perugia. Next I tried the door, and found it without lock or bolt—in fact it swung open as noiselessly and easily as if it had been greased. The toy pitcher and basin came next—too small even to throw at a cat. It was a case, then, of bare fists and the devil take the hindmost.

"With this clear in my mind, I laid the pitcher on the floor within an inch of the door, so that the edge would strike it if opened, and again raised the window high enough for me to jump through. I could, of course, have dragged the

chest across the door, as a girl would have done, put the basin and pitcher on top, and shoved the head-board of the bed against the window-sash—but this I was ashamed to do; and then, again, the whole thing might be a blooming farce—one I would laugh over in the morning.

"The question now arose whether I should get into my clothes, walk boldly down the corridor, and make a break through the kitchen and square room, with the risk of being stabbed in the garden, or whether I should stick it out until morning. Inside, I could choose my fighting ground; outside was a different thing. Then, again, daylight was not far off.

"I decided to hold the fort; slipped into my clothes—all but my coat—packed my knapsack, laid the basin within striking distance of the pitcher, placed the candle and matches close to my hand, stretched myself on the bed, and, strange as it may seem to you, again dropped off to sleep; only to find myself again sitting bolt upright in bed, my heart pounding away like a trip-hammer, my ears wide open.

"More footsteps!—this time in the corridor. I slid out of bed, crept to the door, and pulled myself together. When the pitcher and basin came together with a clink, he would get it be-

hind the ear—all at once—ker-chunk! He was so close now that I heard his fingers feeling around in the dark for the knob. A steady, gentle push with his hand near the key-hole, and he could then steal in without waking me. Whether he smelt me or not I do not know, for I made no sound—not even with my breath—but he came to a dead halt, backed away, rose to his feet and tiptoed down the corridor.

"That settled all sleep for the night, and it was just as well, for the day was breaking—first the gray, pallid light, then the yellow, and then the rose tint. Nothing like a sunrise to put a fellow's ghosts to flight. So I picked up the basin and pitcher, unhooked my towel, had a wash, finished dressing, leaned out of the window for a while watching the rising sun warm up the little snow peaks one after another, and, shouldering my trap, started along the corridor and so on downstairs.

"The pot-bellied lump of a scoundrel was waiting for me in the square room. He gave me the same keen, scrutinizing look with which he had welcomed me the night before. This time it began with my hair and ended at my boots, which were still muddy from the tramp of the previous evening.

"'I am sorry, your Excellency,' he said, 'but if you had left your shoes outside your door I could have polished them; I was afraid of disturbing you or I should have hunted for them inside.'"

Louis, as he finished, settled his big shoulders back in the chair until it creaked with his weight, and ran his eye around the table waiting for the explosion which he knew would follow. All we could do was to stare helplessly in his face. Le Blanc, who hadn't drawn a full breath since the painter began, found his voice first.

"And he didn't intend cutting your throat?" he roared indignantly.

"No, of course not—I never said he did. I said I was scared blue, and I was—real indigo. Oh!—an awful night—hardly got an hour's sleep."

"But what about the fellow on the shed, and his footsteps, and the shadow of the hand?" demanded Brierley, wholly disappointed at the outcome of the yarn.

"There was no fellow, Brierley, and no footsteps." This came in mild, gentle tones, as if the hunter's credulity were something surpris-

ing. "I thought you understood. It was the scraping of the dead tree against the roof of the shed that made the creaking noise; the hand was the shadow cast by the end of a bunched-up branch swaying in the wind. The same thing occurred the next night and on every moonlight night for a week after—as long as I stayed."

"And what became of the soap-suddy brigand with the rosaries?" inquired The Engineer calmly, looking at Louis over the bowl of his pipe, a queer smile playing around his lips.

"Oh, a ripping good fellow," returned Louis in the same innocent, childlike tone—"a real comfort; best in the village outside the landlord and his wife, with whom I stayed two weeks. Brought me my luncheon every day and crawled up a breakneck hill to do it, and then kept on two miles to mail my letters."

"Well, but Louis," I exclaimed, "what a mean, thin, fake of a yarn; no point, no plot—no nothing but a string of——"

"Yes, High-Muck, quite true—no plot, no nothing; but it is as good as your bogus ghosts and shivering bishops. And then I always had my doubts about that bishop, High-Muck. I've heard you tell that story before, and it has

always struck me as highly improper. I don't wonder the girl was scared to death and skipped the next morning. And the gay old bishop! Felt cold, did he?" and Louis threw back his head and laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

XII

WHY MIGNON WENT TO MARKET

IT is market day at Dives. This means that it is Saturday. On Friday the market is at Cabourg, on Wednesday at Buezval, and on the other days at the several small towns within a radius of twenty miles.

It means, too, that the street fronting the Inn is blocked up with a line of carts, little and big, their shafts in the gutter, the horses eating from troughs tied to the hind axle; that another line stretches its length along the narrow street on the kitchen side of the Inn which leads to the quaint Norman church, squeezing itself through a yet narrower street into a small open square, where it comes bump up against a huge hulk of a building, choked up on these market days with piles of vegetables, crates of chickens, boxes of apples, unruly pigs alive and squealing; patient, tired, little calves; geese, ducks — all squawking; chrysanthemums in pots spread out on the sidewalk; old brass, old iron; everything that

goes to supply the needs of the white-capped women and wide-hatted men who crowd every square foot of standing room.

Market day means, too, that Pierre is unusually busy; and so is Lemois, and so are Leà and our little Mignon. Long before any one of us were out of bed this morning, the courtyard was crowded with big red-faced Norman farmers and their fat wives, all talking at once over their coffee, each with half a glass of Calvados (Norman apple-jack) dumped into their cups. At noon, the market over, they were back again for their midday breakfast, and Pierre, who had been working since daylight without a mouthful to eat, then placed on a big table in one of the open kiosks a huge earthen crock, sizzling-hot, filled with tripe, bits of pork, and chicken—the whole seasoned with onions and giving out a most seductive and inviting smell when its earthenware cover was lifted. There were great loaves of brown bread, too, which Lemois himself cut and served to the guests, besides cold pork in slices and cabbage chopped into shreds. When each plate was full, and the knives and forks had begun to rattle, he went indoors for his most precious heirloom—the square cut-glass decan-

ter with its stopper made of silver buttons cut from a peasant's jacket and soldered together—and after brimming each glass, seated himself and took his meal with the others, bowing them out when breakfast was over—hat in hand—as if they were ambassadors of a foreign court—gentleman and peasant, as he is—while they, full to their eyelids, stumbled up into their several carts, their women climbing in after.

And a great day it was for an out-door meal or for anything else one's soul longed for—and they have these days in Normandy in October, when the fire is out in the Marmouset, the air a caress, and a hunger for the vanished summer comes over you. So soothing was the touch of the autumn air, and so lovely the tones of the autumn sky, that Louis hauled out a sketch-box from beneath a pile of canvases, and tucking one of them under his arm, disappeared through the big gate in the direction of the old church. Brierley took down his gun, and, calling Peter, strolled out of the court-yard promising to be back at luncheon, while Herbert, who had risen at dawn and walked to Houlgate to bid The Engineer good-by, dragged out an easy-chair from the "Gal-

lerie," backed it up against the statue of the Great Louis, and under pretence of resting his legs, buried himself in a book, the warm sunshine full on the page.

I, being left to my own devices, waited until the last cart with its well-fed load of Norman farmers had turned the corner of the Inn and quiet reigned again; and remembering that I was host, sought out our landlord and put the question squarely as to what objections, if any, he, the lord of the manor, had to our lunching out of doors too, and at the same table on which Pierre had placed the big crock and its attendant trimmings.

"Of course, my dear Monsieur High-Muck, you shall all lunch in the court, but the menu shall be better adapted to your more gentle appetites than the one prepared for our departed guests. I am at this moment paying the penalty for my share of the indigestible mess—but then I could not hurt their feelings by refusing—and so I have a queer feeling here"—and he ironed his waistcoat with the flat of his hand, his eyes upraised as if in pain. "But let me think—what shall it be to-day? I have a fish which Mignon, who has just gone to the market, will bring back, be-

cause I could not go myself nor spare Leà. Those big-eating people came so early and stayed so late. After the fish we will have Poulet Vallèe D'auge, with stewed celery, and at last a Pêche Flambée—and it will be the last time, for the late peaches are about over. And now about the wine—will you pick it out or shall I? Ah!—I remember—only yesterday I found a few bottles of Moncontour Vouvray at the bottom of a shelf in my old wine-cellar. It will bring fresh courage to your hearts. When it does not do that, and you have only dull despair or thick headaches, it should be poured out on the ground"—having delivered which homily, the old man, with his eye on Coco asleep on his perch, sauntered slowly up the court in the direction of the wine-cellar, from which he emerged a few minutes later bearing two dust-encrusted bottles topped with yellow wax—a distinguishing mark which he himself had placed there some twenty years before and had forgotten.

So while Herbert read on, only looking up now and then from his book, Leà and I set the table, stripping it of its rough, heavy dishes, swabbing it off with a clean, water-soaked towel—I did the swabbing and Leà held the

basin—bringing from the Marmouset our linen and china, then dragging up the big wooden chairs, which were rain-proof and never housed.

We missed Mignon, of course. Buying a fish, and the market but half a dozen blocks away, should not require a whole hour for its completion, especially since she had been told to hurry—more especially still, since Pierre's pot was on the boil awaiting its arrival, Louis and Brierley having returned hungry as bears. Indeed I had already started in to ask Lemois the plump question as to what detained our Bunch of Roses, when Leà's thin, sharp, fingers clutched my coat-sleeve, her eyes on Lemois. What she meant I dared not ask, but there was no doubt in my mind that it had to do with the love affair in which every man of us was mixed up as coconspirator—a conclusion which was instantly confirmed when I looked into her shrivelled face and caught the joyous, lantern flare behind her eyes.

Waiting until we were out of hearing, Lemois having gone to the kitchen, she answered with a shake of her old head:

"Mignon loiters because Gaston is well again."

"But he has never been ill. That crack on

his head did him a lot of good—hurt Monsieur Lemois, I fancy, more than it did Gaston—set him to thinking—maybe now it will come out all right."

"No; it only made him the more obstinate; he has forbidden the boy the place."

"And is that why you are so happy?"

The shrewd, kindly eyes of the old woman looked into mine and then a sudden smile flung a myriad of wrinkles across her face.

"I am happy, monsieur," she whispered as I followed her around the table with the box of knives and forks, "because things are getting brighter. Gaston has a stall now in the market where he can sell his fish himself, and where Mignon can see him once in a while. She is with him now. You know the hucksters paid him what they pleased, and sometimes, even when Gaston's catch was big, he made only a few francs some mornings. And the mother and he were obliged to take what they could get, for you cannot wait with fish when the weather is hot. To buy the stall and pay for it all at once was what troubled them, so it is a great day for Gaston—Monsieur Gaston Duprè now"—and her eyes twinkled. "Even if Monsieur Lemois holds out—and he may,

after all—then there may be another way. Is it not so? Ah, we will see! She is very happy now. Only I am getting nervous; she stays so long I am afraid that Monsieur Lemois may find out," and she shot an anxious glance up the garden.

"What did the stall cost, Leà?" I asked, flattening the knives beside the plates as I talked, my eye on the kitchen door so Lemois should not surprise us.

"Oh, a great sum—one hundred and ten francs. Two knives here, if you please, monsieur."

"Well, where did it come from—their savings?" obeying her directions as I spoke.

"No—not his money nor his mother's; she could not spare so much. She must be buried some time, and there must always be money enough for that. All Gaston knows is that the chief of the market came to his house and left the receipt with the permit. It is for a year."

"Well—somebody must have paid. Who was it?" I had finished with the knives and had begun on the forks and tablespoons.

"Yes—there was somebody, perhaps it was madame la marquise?" and she turned quickly

and looked into my eyes, an expression of shrewd inquiry adding a new set of wrinkles to her gentle face. "Maybe you know, monsieur?"

"No, it's all news to me. I am glad for her sake, anyhow, whoever did it. Was it news to Mignon?"

"When?"

"Why this morning when she went to market?"

"Yes, of course it was news to her. I, myself, only knew it last night, and I wouldn't tell her; she would have betrayed herself in her joy. So when the market people stayed so long—and I did all I could to make them stay"—here her small bead eyes were pinched tight in merriment—"I said there was nothing for your dinner and we must have a fish and that Mignon might better go for it. Watch her when she returns: her face will tell you whether she has seen him or not. Now give me the box, monsieur, and thank you for helping me. Listen! There she comes; I hear her singing."

And so did the whole court-yard, and she kept on singing, her basket on her arm, her face in full sunlight, until she espied Leà. Then down

went the fish and away she flew, throwing her arms around the dear old woman's neck, not caring who saw her; hugging her one minute, kissing her seamed cheeks the next, chattering like a magpie all the time, her eyes flashing, her cheeks red as two roses.

Only when Lemois appeared in the kitchen door and bent his steps toward us did her customary demureness return, and even then the joy in her heart was only stifled for the moment by a fear of his having overheard her song and of his wondering at the cause.

And if the truth be told, he did come very near finding out when luncheon was served, and would have done so but for the fact that I upset Le Blanc's glass of Vouvray and followed up the warning with a punch below his fat waist-line when he began telling us how sorry he was for being late, he having made a wide détour to avoid the market carts, winding up with: "And oh, by the way, I met your little maid, Mignon, in the fish-market; she was having a beautiful time with a young fisherman who——"

It was here the dig came in.

"Ouch! What the devil, High-Muck, do you mean? Oh, I understand—yes, as I was say-

ing"—here he stole a glance at Lemois—"I met Mignon in the market; she was buying a beautiful fish. I hope, Monsieur Lemois, we are to have it for dinner. Don't bother, Leà, about the spilt wine; just get me a fresh glass. And, Louis, do you mind letting go that crusting of cobwebs so I can get another taste of that nosegay?" and thus the day was saved.

We broke loose, however, when Lemois was gone, and I told the whole story as Leà had given it, Louis, in his customary rôle of toastmaster, rising in his seat and pledging the young couple, whose health and happiness we all drank, Brierley whistling the Wedding March to the accompaniment of a great clatter of knives and forks on the plates.

In fact, the very air seemed so charged with uncontrollable exhilaration that Coco, the oldest and most knowing of birds—he is sixty-five and has seen more love-making from his perch in the dormer overlooking that same courtyard than all the chaperones who ever lived—suddenly broke out into screams of delight, ruffling his feathers, curling up his celery sprout of a topknot, his eyes following Mignon, his head cocked on one side, when she raced back and forth from Pierre's range to our big table.

Even Tito, the scrap of a black kitten, who was never three feet away from Mignon's heels, dodged in and out of her swaying petticoats in mad chase after her restless feet, and would not be quieted until she stopped long enough to take him up in her arms for a moment's cuddling.

Of none of all this, thank Heaven, did Lemois have the faintest glimmer of a suspicion. When on her return from market he had scolded her for being late, he had taken her silence only as proof that she thought she deserved it. When he would have broken out on her again, suddenly remembering that our coffee was likely to be delayed, Herbert, to whom I had whispered my discovery—diplomat as he was—begged him to delay the serving of it until it could be poured directly from the pot into our cups, as the air of the court would chill it. All of which, Heaven be thanked again, Mignon overheard, sending her flying back to the kitchen, her eyes aglow with the happiness of a secret that filled her heart to bursting.

When she at last appeared with the coffee-pot, so contagious was her joy that our extended hands trembled as we held the tiny cups beneath her fingers. Somehow we had caught

a little of her thrill. And it was all so evident and so marvellous and so inspiring that every man Jack of us, blighted old bachelors as we were, fell to wondering whether, after all, it would not have been better to have bent the neck to the yoke and had a running-mate beside us than to have continued our dreary trot in single harness.

XIII

WITH A DISSERTATION ON ROUND PEGS AND SQUARE HOLES

WORK on the wrecked villa of madame la marquise was progressing with a vim. The Engineer, called in consultation, had with a comprehensive grasp of the situation brushed aside the architect's plan of shoring up one end of the structure at a time; had rigged a pair of skids made from some old abandoned timber found on the beach and with a common ship's windlass, a heavy hawser, and a "Heave ho, my hearties!"—to which every loose fisherman within reach lent a hand—had dragged the ruin up the hill and landed it intact on level ground some twenty feet back from its former site. This done—and it was accomplished in a day—the porch was straightened and the lopsided walls forced into place. With the exception of the collapsed chimney, the former residence of the distinguished lady was not such a wreck as had been supposed.

Next followed the slicing off of the raw edge

of the landslide, the building of a fence, and, later on, the preparation of a new garden. This last was to be madame's very own, and neither care nor cost was to be considered in its making. She could sleep in a garage—she had slept there since the catastrophe—and take her meals from the top of a barrel (which was also true), but a garden meant the very breath of her life—flowers she must have—flowers all the time, from the first crocus to the last October blossoms. Marc, now her abject slave, was then at Rouen arranging for their shipment. The daily news—such as twenty or more men at work, the chimney half finished, the fence begun, etc., etc.—Le Blanc, who was constantly at the site, generally brought us at night, his report being received with the keenest zest, for the marquise was now counted as the most delightful of our coterie.

His very latest and most important bulletin set us all to speculating;—the old garage—here his voice rose in intensity—was to be moved back some fifty feet and a new wing added, with bedroom above and a kitchen below. "A new garage!" we had all exclaimed. Who then was to occupy it? Not madame, of course, nor her servants, for they, as hereto-

fore, would be quartered in the reconstructed villa. Certainly not any of her visitors—and most assuredly not Marc!

"Take my advice and stop guessing," laughed the Frenchman; "she'll tell you when she gets ready, and not before. And she'll have the wing completed on time, for nothing daunts her. To want a thing done is, with her, to have it finished. The new wing was an afterthought, and yet it did not delay the work an hour. She'll be serving tea in that wreck next week."

"It is because madame la marquise was born with a gift," remarked Lemois dryly from his seat near the fire. "Her mind is constructive, and everything madame touches must have a definite beginning and lead up to a definite ending. Her sanity is shown in her never trying to do things for which she is not fitted. As a musician, or a painter, or even a sculptor, or in any occupation demanding a fine imagination, madame, it seems to me, would have been a pathetic failure."

"How about an antiquary?" remarked Louis, blowing a ring of smoke across the table, a quizzical smile lighting up his face.

"As an antiquary, my dear Monsieur Louis,

the eminent lady would have been a pronounced success. She is one now, for she insists on knowing that the thing she buys is genuine, and it saves her many absurdities. I can think of nothing in her collection that can be questioned—and I cannot say that of my own."

"And so you don't believe that a man or a woman can make what they please of themselves?" asked Herbert, who was always glad to hear from Lemois.

"Not any more than I believe that tulip bulbs will grow blackberries if I water them enough."

"It's all a question of blood," essayed Le Blanc, snipping the end from his cigar with a gold cutter attached to his watch-chain. "Failures in life are almost always due to a scrap of gray tissue clogging up a gentleman's brain, which, ten chances to one, he has inherited from some plebeian ancestor."

"Failures in life come from nothing of the sort!" blurted out Louis. "It's just dead laziness, and of the cheapest kind. All the painters I knew at Julien's who waited for a mood are waiting yet."

"The trouble with most unsuccessful men,"

volunteered Brierley, "is the everlasting trimming up of a square peg to make it fit a round hole."

"Then drive it in and make it fit," answered Louis. "It will hug all the tighter for the raw edges it raises."

"And if it splits the plank, Louis?" I asked.

"Let it split! A man, High-Muck, who can't make a success of his life is better out of it, unless he's a cripple, and then he can have my pocket-book every time. Look at Herbert!—he's forged ahead; yet he's been so hungry sometimes he could have gnawed off the soles of his shoes."

"Only the imagination of the out-door painter, gentlemen," answered Herbert with a laughing nod to the table at large. "The hungry part is, perhaps, correct, but I forget about the shoes."

"I stick to my point!" exclaimed Le Blanc, facing Herbert as he spoke. "It's blood as well as push that makes a man a success. When he lacks the combination he fails—that is, he does nine times out of ten, and that percentage, of course, is too small to trust to."

"That reminds me of a story," interrupted Brierley with one of his quiet laughs, "of some

fellows who took chances on the percentage, as Le Blanc calls it, and yet, as we Americans say, 'arrived.' A well-born young Englishman, down on his luck, had been tramping the streets, too proud to go home to his father's house, the spirit of the hobo still in him. One night he struck up an acquaintance with another young chap as poor and independent as himself. Naturally they affiliated. Both were sons of gentlemen and both vagabonds in the best sense. One became a reporter and the other a news-gatherer. The first had no dress suit and was debarred from state functions and smart receptions; the second boasted not only a dress suit useful at weddings, but a respectable morning frock-coat for afternoon teas. The two outfits brought them lodgings and three meals a day, for what the dress suit could pick up in the way of society news the man with the pen got into type. Things went on this way until August set in and the season closed; then both men lost their jobs. For some weeks they braved it out, badgering the landlady; then came the pawning of their clothes, and then one meal a day, and then a bench in St. James's Park out of sight of the bobbies. This being rock bottom, a council

of war was held. The news-gatherer shipped aboard an outgoing vessel and disappeared from civilization. The reporter kept on reporting. Both had courage and both had the best blood of England in their veins, according to my view. Twenty years later the two met at a drawing-room in Buckingham Palace. The reporter had risen to a peer and the news-gatherer to a merchant prince. There was a hearty handshake, a furtive glance down the long, gold-encrusted corridor, and then, with a common impulse, the two moved to an open window and looked out. Below them lay the bench on which the two had slept twenty years before."

"Of course!" shouted Le Blanc; "that's just what I said—a case of good blood—that's what kept them going. They owed it to their ancestors."

"Ancestors be hanged! It was a case of pure grit!" shouted Louis in return. "All the blood in the world wouldn't have helped them if it hadn't been for that. Neither of them expected, when they started out in life, to be shown up six flights of marble stairs by a hundred flunkeys in silk stockings, but, as Brierley puts it, 'they *arrived* all the same.' Blood alone would have landed them as clerks in govern-

ment pay or obscure country gentlemen waiting for somebody to die. They kept on driving in the peg and before they got through all the chinks were filled. Keep your toes in your pumps, gentlemen. High-Muck is loaded for something; I see it in his eyes. Go on, High-Muck, and let us have it. How do you vote—blood or brains?"

"Neither," I answered. "Lemois is nearest the truth. You can't make a silk purse out of—you know the rest—neither can you force a man, nor can he force himself, to succeed in something for which he is not fitted. All you do is to split the plank and ruin his life. I'll tell you a story which will perhaps give you and idea of what I mean.

"Perhaps five years ago—perhaps six—my memory is always bad for dates—I met a fellow in one of our small Western cities at home who, by all odds, was the most brilliant conversationalist I had run across for years. The acquaintance began as my audience—I was lecturing at the time—left the room and was continued under the sidewalk, where we had a porter-house steak and a mug apiece, the repast and talk lasting until two in the morning. Gradually I learned his history. He had started

life as a reporter; developed into space writer, then editor, and was known as the most caustic and brilliant journalist on any of the Western papers. With the death of his wife, he had thrown up this position and was, when I met him, conducting a small country paper.

"What possessed me I don't know, but after seeing him half a dozen times that winter—and I often passed through his town—I made up my mind that his brilliant talk, quaint philosophy, and mastery of English were wasted on what he was doing, and that if I could persuade him to write a novel he would not only drop into the hole his Maker had bored for him, but would make a name for himself. All that he had to do was to *put himself into type* and the rest would follow. Of course he protested; he was fifty years old, he said, had but little means, no experience in fiction, his work not being imaginative but concerned with the weightier and more practical things of the day.

"All this made me only the keener to do something to drag him out of the pit and start him in a new direction.

"The first thing was to make him believe in himself. I pooh-poohed the idea of his failure to succeed at fifty as being any reason for

his not acquiring distinction at sixty, and counted on my fingers the men who had done their best work late in life. Taking up some of the editorials he had sent me (undeniable proofs, so he had maintained, of his inability to do anything better or, rather, different), I picked out a sentence here and there, reading it aloud and dilating on his choice of words; I showed him how his style would tell in an up-to-date novel, and how forceful his short, pithy epigrams would be scattered throughout its text.

"Little by little he began to enthuse: I had kindled his pride—something that had lain dormant for years—and the warmth of its revival soon sent the blood of a new hope tingling through his veins. He now confessed that he *had* always wanted to write sustained fiction without ever having had either the opportunity or the strength to begin. Inspired by my efforts, others of his friends at home joined in the bracing up, recognizing as I had done the charm and quality of the man—his wit and tenderness, his philosophy and knowledge of the life about him. They forgot, of course, as had I, that in fiction—and in all imaginative literature for that matter—something more is required than either a knowledge of men or the

ability for turning out phrases. As an actor steps in between the dramatist and the audience —visualizing and vitalizing the text by deft gestures, telling emphases, and those silent pauses often more effective than the speech itself—so must the author with his pen: in other words, he must infuse into the written word something that presents to you in print that which the actor makes you *see* beyond the footlights. This, however, you men know all about, so I won't dilate on it.

"Well, he started in and threw himself into the task with a grip and energy of which I had not thought him capable. It took him about six months to finish the novel; then he came East and laid the manuscript in my hands. We shut ourselves up in my study and went over it. When I suggested that a page dragged, he would snatch it from my hand, square himself on my hearth-rug with his back to the fire, and read it aloud, pumping his personality into every line. Conversations which, when I read them, had seemed long-winded and commonplace took on a new meaning. When he had gone to bed I reread the passages and again my heart sank.

"The publisher came next, I delivering the

manuscript myself with all the good things I could say about it.

"At the end of the week that ominous-looking white coffin of an envelope in which so many of our hopes are buried, and which most of us know so well, was laid on my study table, and with it the short obituary notice: 'Not adapted to our uses.'

"I was afraid to tell him, and didn't. I arranged a dinner instead for the three of us—the editor, whom he had not yet met, being one. During the meal not a word was said about the rejected novel. I had cautioned the author—and, of course, the editor never brought his shop to a dinner-table.

"After the cigars I took up the manuscript and the discussion opened. The editor was very frank, very kind, and very helpful. He had wanted to publish it, but there were long passages—essays, really—in which the reader's galloping interest would get stalled. Experience had taught him that it was slow-downs like these that mired so much of modern fiction.

"'Which passages, for instance,' I asked rather casually.

"'Well, the part which— Hand me the manuscript and I will——'

"'No; suppose my friend reads it—you have enough of that to do all day.'

"Just as I expected, the reader's personality again transformed everything. The long-winded descriptions under the magic of his voice seemed too short, while every conversation thought dull before appeared to be illumined by a hidden meaning tucked away between the lines.

"When the editor left at midnight the coffin was in his pocket. Two days later the book department forwarded a contract with a check for five hundred dollars as advance royalties.

"There was no holding my friend down to earth after that. His joy and pride in that shambling, God-forsaken, worthless plodder whom he had despised for years was overwhelming. He was like a boy out of school. Stories which he had forgotten were pulled out of the past and given with a humor and point that dazzled every one around my study fire. Personal reminiscences of politicians he had known, and campaigns he had directed from his editorial chair, were told in a way that made them live in our memories ever after. Never had any of my friends met so delightful and cultivated a man.

"The next day he went back to his home town carrying his enthusiasm with him.

"In two months the usual book notices began to crop out in the papers—all written in the publisher's establishment—a fact which he must have known, but which, from his enthusiastic letters, I saw he had overlooked. His own village papers reprinted the notices with editorial comments of their own—'Our distinguished fellow-citizen,' etc.—that sort of thing.

"These were also forwarded to me by mail with renewed thanks for the service I had done him—he, the 'modern Lazarus snatched from an early grave.' When a bona fide reviewer noticed the book at all, it was in half a dozen lines, with allusions to the amateurishness of the effort—'his first and, it is hoped, his last,' one critic was brutal enough to add. When one of these reached him, it was dismissed with a smile. He knew what he had done, and so would the world once the book got out among the people.

"Then the first six months' account was mailed him. The royalty sales had not reached one-half of the first payment!

"He sat—so his brother told me afterward

—with the firm's letter in his hand, and for an hour never opened his lips. That afternoon he went to bed; in three months he was dead! It had broken his heart.

"I, too, sat with a paper in my hand—his brother's telegram. Had I done right or wrong? I am still wondering and I have not yet solved the question. Had I never crossed his path and had he kept on in his editor's chair, giving out short, crisp comments on the life of the day, he would, no doubt, be alive and earning a fair support. I had attempted the impossible and failed. The square peg in the round hole had split the plank!"

"Better split it," remarked Louis, "than stop all driving. Poor fellow, I'm sorry for him; nothing hurts like having your pride dragged in the mud, and nothing brings keener suffering—I've seen it and know. Why didn't you brace him up again, High-Muck?"

"I did try, but it was too late. Just before he died he wrote me the old refrain: 'At twenty-five I might have weathered it, but not at fifty.'"

Herbert drew his chair closer, assuming his favorite gesture, his hands on the edge of the table.

"I say 'poor fellow' too, Louis, but High-Muck has not put his finger on the right spot. It was not the man's pride that was wounded; nor did he die of a broken heart. He died because he had not reached his pinnacle, and that is quite a different thing. What blinded him and destroyed his reason—for it cannot be thought very sensible for a man to abandon a certain fixed income for a rainbow—was not your reviving his belief in himself, but your giving him, for the first time, an opportunity to spread his wings. But for that you could not have persuaded him to write a line. The pitiful thing was that the wings were not large enough—still they were *wings* to be used in the air of romance, and not legs with which to tread the roads of the commonplace, and he knew it. He had felt them growing ever since he was a boy. It is only a question of the spread of one's feathers, after all, whether one succeeds soaring over mountains with a view of the never-ending Valley of Content below, or whether one keeps on grovelling in the mud."

As Herbert paused a tremulous silence fell upon the group. That he, of all men, should thus penetrate, if not espouse, the cause of failure—the hardest of all things for a man

of phenomenal success to comprehend or excuse in his fellows—came as a new note.

"To illustrate this theory," he continued, unconscious of the effect he had produced, "I will tell you about a man whom I once came across in one of the studios of Paris, back of the Pantheon. All his life he had determined to be a sculptor—and when I say 'determined' I mean he had thought of nothing else. By day he worked in the atelier, at night he drew from a cast—a custom then of the young sculptors. In the Louvre and in the Luxembourg—out in the gardens of the Tuileries—wherever there was something moulded or cut into form, there at odd hours you could always find this enthusiast. At night too, when the other students were trooping through the Quartier, breaking things or outrunning the gendarmes, this poor devil was working away, doing Ledas and Venuses and groups of nudes, with rearing horses and chariots,—all the trite subjects a young sculptor attempts whose imagination outruns his ability.

"Year after year his things would come up before the jury and be rejected; and they deserved it. Soon it began to dawn on his associates, but never on him, that, try as he might,

there was something lacking in his artistic make-up. With the master standing over him advising a bit of clay put on here, or a slice taken off there, he had seemed to progress; when, however, he struck out for himself his results were most disheartening. It was during this part of his life that I came to know him. He was then a man of forty, ten years younger than your dead novelist, High-Muck, and, like him, a man of many sorrows. The difference was that all his life my man had been poor; at no time for more than a week had he ever been sure of his bread. As he was an expert moulder and often gratuitously helped his brother sculptors in taking casts of their clay figures, he had often been begged to accept employment at good wages with some of the stucco people, but he had refused and had fought on, preferring starvation to *pâtisserie*, as he called this kind of work.

"Nor had he, like your novelist, happiness to look back upon. He had married young, as they all do, and there had come a daughter who had grown to be eighteen, and who had been lost in the whirl—slipped in the mud, they said, and the city had rolled over her. And then the wife died and he was alone. The girl had crept up his stairs one night and lay shivering outside

his door; he had taken her in, put her to bed, and fed her. Later on her last lover discovered by chance her hiding-place, and in the mould-maker's absence the two had found the earthen pot with the few francs he owned and had spent them. After that he had shut his door in her face. And so the fight went on, his ideal still alive in his heart, his one purpose to give it flight—'soaring over the heads of the millions,' as he put it, 'so that even dullards might take off their hats in recognition.'

"When I again met him he was living in an old, abandoned theatre on the outskirts of Paris, a weird, uncanny ruin—rats everywhere—the scenery hanging in tatters, the stage broken down, the pit filled to the level of the footlights with a mass of coal—for a dealer in fuels had leased it for this purpose, his carts going in and out of the main entrance. One of the dressing-rooms over the flies was his studio, reached by a staircase from the old stage entrance. A former tenant had cut a skylight under which my friend worked.

"In answer to his 'Entrez' I pushed open his door and found him in a sculptor's blouse cowering over a small sheet-iron stove on which some food was being cooked. He raised his

head, straightened his back, and came toward me—a small, shrunken man now, prematurely old, his two burning eyes looking out from under his ledge of a forehead like coals beneath a half-burnt log, a shock of iron-gray hair sticking straight up from his scalp as would a brush. About his nose, up his cheeks, around his mouth, and especially across his throat, which was free of a cravat, ran pasty wrinkles, like those on a piece of uncooked tripe. Only half-starved men who have lived on greasy soups and scraps from the kitchens have these complexions.

"I describe him thus carefully to you because that first glance of his scarred face had told me his life's story. It is the same with every man who suffers.

"He talked of his work, of the conspiracies that had followed him all his career, shutting him out of his just rewards, while less brilliant men snatched the prizes which should have been his; of his hopes for the future; of the great competition soon to come off at Rheims, in which he would compete—not that he had yet put his idea into clay—that was always a mere question of detail with him. Then, as if by the merest accident—something he had quite forgotten, but which he thought might

interest me—he told me, with a quickening of his glance and the first smile I had seen cross his pasty face, of a certain statue of his, 'a Masterpiece,' which a great connoisseur had bought for his garden, and which faced one of the open spaces of Paris. I could see it any day I walked that way—indeed, if I did not mind, he would go with me—he had been housed all the morning and needed the air.

"I pleaded an excuse and left him, for I knew all about this masterpiece which had been bought by a tradesman and planted in his garden among groups of cast-iron dogs and spouting dolphins, the hedge in front cut low enough for passers-by to see the entire collection. Hardly a day elapsed that the poor fellow did not walk by, drinking in the beauty of his work, comforting himself with the effect it produced on the plain people who stopped to admire. Sometimes he would accost them and bring the conversation round to the sculptor, and then abruptly take his leave, they staring at him as he bowed his thanks.

"The following year I again looked him up; his poverty and his courage appealed to me; besides, I intended to help him. When I knocked at his door he did not cry 'Entrez'—he kept

still, as if he had not heard me or was out. When I pushed the door open he turned, looked at me for an instant, and resumed his work. Again my eyes took him in—thinner, dryer, less nourished. He was casting the little images you buy from a board carried on a vendor's back.

"Without heeding his silence I at once stated my errand. He should make a statue for my garden; furthermore, his name and address should be plainly cut in the pedestal.

"He thanked me for my order, but he made no more statues, he said. He was now engaged in commercial work. Art was dead. Nobody cared. Did I remember his great statue—the one in the garden?—his Apollo?—the Greek of modern times? Well, the place had changed hands, and the new owner had carted it away with the cast-iron dogs and the dolphins and ploughed up the lawn to make an artichoke-bed. The masterpiece was no more. 'I found all that was left of my work,' he added, 'on a dirt heap in the rear of his out-house, the head gone and both arms broken short off.'

"His voice wavered and ceased, and it was with some difficulty that he straightened his back, moved his drying plaster casts one side,

and offered me the free part of the bench for a seat.

"I remained standing and broke out in protest. I abused the ignorance and jealousy of the people and of the juries—did everything I could, in fact, to reassure him and pump some hope into him—precisely what you did to your own author, High-Muck. I even agreed to pay in advance for the new statue I had ordered. I told him, too, that if he would come back to the country with me, I would make a place for him in an empty greenhouse, where he could work undisturbed. He only shook his head.

"'What for?' he answered—'for money? I am alone in the world, and it's of no use to me. I am accustomed to being starved. For fame? I have given my life to express the thoughts of my heart and nobody would listen. Now it is finished. I will keep them for the good God—perhaps He will listen.'

"A week later I found him sitting bolt upright in his chair under the skylight, dead. Above in the dull gloom hung a row of plaster models, his own handiwork—fragments of arms and hands with fists clenched ready to strike; queer torsos writhing in pain; queerer masks with hollow eyes. In the grimy light these

seemed to have come to life—the torsos leaning over, hunching their shoulders at him as if blaming him for their suffering; the masks mocking at his misery, leering at each other. It was a grewsome sight, and I did not shake off the memory of the scene for days.

"And so I hold," added Herbert, with a sorrowful shake of his head "that it is neither pride nor suffering that kills men of this class. It is because they have failed to reach the pinnacle of their ideals—that goal for which some spirits risk both their lives and their hopes of heaven."

XIV

A WOMAN'S WAY

HOWEVER serious the talk of the night before—and Herbert's pathetic story of the poor mould-maker was still in our memory when we awoke—the effect was completely dispelled as soon as we began to breathe the air of the out of doors.

The weather helped—another of those caressing Indian-summer days—the sleepy sun with half-closed eyes dozing at you through its lace curtains of mist; every fire out and all the windows wide open.

Leà helped. Never were her sabots so active nor so musical in their scuffle: now hot milk, now fresh coffee, now another crescent—all on the run, and all with a spontaneous, uncontrollable laugh between each serving—all the more unaccountable as of late the dear old woman's face, except at brief intervals, had been as long as an undertaker's.

And Mignon helped!

Helped? Why, she was the whole programme—with another clear, ringing, happy

song that came straight from her heart; her head thrown back, her face to the sun as if she would drink in all its warmth and cheer, the coffee-roaster keeping time to the melody.

And it was not many minutes before each private box and orchestra chair in and about the court-yard, as well as the top galleries, were filled with spectators ready for the rise of the curtain. Herbert leaned out over his bedroom sill, one story up; Brierley from the balcony, towel in hand, craned his head in attention; Louis left his seat in the kiosk, where he was at work on a morning sketch of the court, and I abandoned my chair at one of the tables: all listened and all watched for what was going to happen. For happen something certainly must, with our pretty Mignon singing more merrily than ever.

I, being nearest to the footlights, beckoned to old Leà carrying the coffee, and pointed inquiringly to the blissful girl.

"What's the meaning of all this, Leà?—what has happened? Your Mignon seemed joyous enough the other morning when she came from market, but now she is beside herself."

The old woman lowered her voice, and, with a shake of her white cap, answered:

"Don't ask me any questions; I am too happy to tell you any lies and I won't tell you the truth. Ah!—see how cold monsieur's milk is—let me run to Pierre for another"—and she was off; her flying sabots, like the upturned feet of a duck chased to cover, kicking away behind her short skirts.

Lemois, too, had heard the song and, picking up Coco, strolled toward me his fingers caressing the bird, his uneasy glance directed toward the happy girl as he walked, wondering, like the rest of us, at the change in her manner. To watch them together as I have done these many times, the old man smoothing its plumage and Coco rubbing his black beak tenderly against his master's cheek, is to get a deeper insight into our landlord's character and the subtle sympathy which binds the two.

The bird once settled comfortably on his wrist, Lemois looked my way.

"You should get him a mate, monsieur," I called to him in answer to his glance, throwing this out as a general drag-net.

The old man shifted the bird to his shoulder, stopped, and looked down at me.

"He is better without one. Half the trouble in the world comes from wanting mates; the

other half comes from not knowing that this is true. My good Coco is not so stupid"—and he reached up and stroked the bird's crest and neck. "All day long he ponders over what is going on down below him. And just think, monsieur, what *does* go on down below him in the season! The wrong man and the wrong woman most of the time, and the pressure of the small foot under the table, and the little note slipped under the napkin. Ah!—they don't humbug Coco! He laughs all day to himself—and I laugh too. There is nothing, if you think about it, so comical as life. It is really a Punch-and-Judy show, with one doll whacking away at the other—'Now, will you be good!—Now, will you be good!'—and they are never good. No—no—never a mate for my Coco—never a mate for anybody if I can help it."

"Would you have given the same advice thirty years ago to madame la marquise?" Madame was the one and only subject Lemois ever seemed to approach with any degree of hesitancy. My objective point was, of course, Mignon; but I had opened madame's gate, hoping for a short cut.

"Ah!—madame is quite different," he re-

plied with sudden gravity. "All the rules are broken in the case of a woman of fashion and of rank and of very great wealth. These people do not live for themselves—they are part of the State. But I will tell you one thing, Monsieur High-Muck, though you may not believe it, and that is that Madame la Marquise de la Caux was never so contented as she is at the present moment. She is free now to do as she pleases. Did you hear what Monsieur Le Blanc said last night about the way the work is being pressed? The old marquis would have been a year deciding on a plan; madame will have that villa on its legs and as good as new in a month. You know, of course, that she is coming down this afternoon?"

I knew nothing of the kind, and told him so.

"Yes; she sent me word last night by a mysterious messenger, who left the note and disappeared before I could see him—Leà brought it to me. You see, madame is most anxious about her flowers for next year, and this afternoon I am going with her to a nursery and to a great garden overlooking the market-place to help her pick them out." Here he caressed his pet again. "No, Monsieur Coco, you will not

"Just think, monsieur, what *does* go on below Coco in the season"

be allowed down here in the court where your pretty white feathers and your unblemished morals might be tarnished by the dreadful people all about. You shall go up on your perch; it is much better"—and with a deprecatory wave of his hand he strolled up the court-yard, Coco still nibbling his cheek with his horny black beak, the old man crooning a little love song as he walked.

I rose from my chair and began bawling out the good news of madame's expected visit to the occupants of the several windows, the effect being almost as startling as had been Mignon's song.

Instantly plans were cried down at me for her entertainment. Of course she must stay to dinner, our last one for the season! This was carried with a whoop. There must be, too, some kind of a special ceremony when the invitation was delivered. We must greet her at the door—all of us drawn up in a row, with Herbert stepping out of the ranks, saluting like a drum-major, and requesting the "distinguished honor"—and the rest of it: that, too, was carried unanimously. Whatever her gardening costume, it would make no difference, and no excuse on this score would receive a

moment's consideration. Madame even in a fisherman's tarpaulins would be welcome—provided only that she was really inside of them.

With the whirl of her motor into the courtyard at dusk, and the breathing of its last wheeze in front of the Marmouset, the plump little woman sprang from her car muffled to her dimpled chin in a long waterproof, her two brown, squirrel eyes laughing behind her goggles. Instantly the importuning began, everybody crowding about her.

Up went her hands.

"No—please don't say a word and, whatever you do, don't invite me to stay to dinner, because I'm not going to; and that is my last word, and nothing will change my mind. Oh!—it is too banal—and you've spoiled everything. I didn't think I'd see anybody. Why are you not all in your rooms? Oh!—I am ready to cry with it all!"

"But we can't think of your leaving us," I begged, wondering what had disturbed her, but determined she should not go until we had found out. "Pierre has been at work all the morning and we——"

"No—it is I who have been working all the morning, digging in my garden, getting ready for the winter, and I am tired out, and so I will go back to my little bed in my dear garage and have my dinner alone."

Here Herbert broke loose. "But, madame, you *must* dine with us; we have been counting on it." He had set his heart on another evening with the extraordinary woman and did not mean to be disappointed.

"But, my dear Monsieur Herbert, you see, I——"

"And you really mean that you won't stay?" groaned Louis, his face expressive of the deepest despair.

"Stop!—stop!—I tell you, and hear me through. Oh!—you dreadful men! Just see what you have done: I had such a pretty little plan of my own—I've been thinking of it for days. I said to myself this morning: I'll go to the Inn after I have finished with Lemois—about six o'clock—when it is getting dark—quite too dark for a lady to be even poking about alone. They will all be out walking or dressing for dinner, and I'll slip into the darling Marmouset, just to warm myself a little, if there should be a fire, and then they will

come in and find me and be so surprised, and before any one of them can say a word I will shout out that I have come to dinner! And now you've ruined everything, and I must say, 'Thank you, kind gentlemen'—like any other poor parishioner—and eat my bowl of bread and milk in the corner. Was there ever *anything* so banal?—Oh!—I'm heartbroken over it all. No; don't say another word—please, papa, I'll be a good girl. So help me off with my wraps, dear Monsieur Louis. No; wait until I get inside—you see, I've been gardening all day, and when one does gardening——"

The two were inside the Marmouset now, the others following, the laughter increasing as Louis led her to the hearth, where a fire had just been kindled. There he proceeded to unbutton her fur-lined motor-cloak—the laughter changing to shouts of delight when freeing herself from its folds. She stood before us a veritable Lebrun portrait, in a short black-velvet gown with wide fichu of Venetian lace rolled back from her plump shoulders, her throat circled with a string of tiny jewels from which drooped a pear-shaped pearl big as a pecan-nut and worth a king's ransom.

"There!" she cried, her brown eyes dancing,

her face aglow with her whirl through the crisp air. "Am I not too lovely, and is not my gardening costume perfect? You see, I am always careful to do my digging in black velvet and lace," and a low gurgling sound like the cooing of doves followed by a burst of uncontrollable laughter filled the room.

If on her other visits she had captured us all by the charm of her personality, she drew the bond the tighter now. Then she had been the thorough woman of the world, adapting herself with infinite tact to new surroundings, contributing her share to the general merriment—one of us, so to speak; to-night she was the elder sister. She talked much to Herbert about his new statue and what he expected to make of it. He must not, she urged, concern himself alone with artistic values or the honors they would bring. He had gone beyond all these; his was a higher mission—one to bring the human side of the African savage to light and so help to overturn the prejudice of centuries, and nothing must swerve him from what she considered his lofty purpose—and there must be no weak repetition of his theme. Each new note he sounded must be stronger than the last.

She displayed the same fine insight when, dinner over, she talked to Louis of his out-door work—especially the whirl and slide of his water.

"You will forgive a woman, Monsieur Louis, who is old enough to be your great-grandmother, when she tells you that, fine as your pictures are—and I know of no painter of our time who paints water as well—there are some things in the out of doors which I am sure you will yet put into your canvases. I am a fisherman myself, and have thrashed many of the brooks you have painted, and there is nothing I love so much as to peer down into the holes where the little fellows live—way down among the pebbles and the brown moss and green of the water-plants. Can't we get this —or do I expect the impossible? But if it could be done—if the bottom as well as the surface of the water could be given—would we not uncover a fresh hiding-place of nature, and would not you—you, Monsieur Louis—be doing the world that much greater service?—the pleasure being more ours than yours—your reward being the giving of that pleasure to us. I hope you will all forgive me, but it has been such an inspiration to meet you all. I get so smothered

by the commonplace that sometimes I gasp for breath, and then I find some oasis like this and I open wide my soul and drink my fill.

"But enough of all this. Let us have something more amusing. Monsieur Brierley, won't you go to the spinet and—" Here she sprang from her chair. "Oh, I forgot all about it, and I put it in my pocket on purpose. Please some one look in my cloak for a roll of music; none of you I know have heard it before. It is an old song of Provence that will revive for you all your memories of the place. Thank you, Monsieur Brierley, and now lift the lid and I will sing it for you." And then there poured from her lips a voice so full and rich, with notes so liquid and sympathetic, that we stood around her in wonder doubting our ears.

Never had we found her so charming nor so bewitching, nor so full of enchanting surprises.

So uncontrollable were her spirits, always rising to higher flights, that I began at last to suspect that something outside of the inspiration of our ready response to her every play of fancy and wit was accountable for her bewildering mood.

The solution came when the coffee was served and fresh candles lighted and Leà and Mignon,

with a curtsy to the table and a gentle, furtive good-night to madame, had left the room. Then, quite as if their departure had started another train of thought, she turned and faced our landlord.

"What a dear old woman is Leà, Lemois," she began in casual tones, "and what good care she takes of that pretty child; she is mother and sister and guardian to her. But she cannot be everything. There is always some other yearning in a young girl's heart which no woman can satisfy. You know that as well as I do. And this is why you are going to give Mignon to young Gaston. Is it not true?" she added in dissembling tones.

Lemois moved uneasily in his chair. The question had come so unexpectedly, and was so direct, that for a moment he lost his poise. His own attitude, he supposed, had been made quite clear the night of the rescue, when he had denounced Gaston and forbidden Mignon to see him. Yet his manner was grave enough as he answered:

"Madame has so many things to occupy her mind, and so many people to help, why should she trouble herself with those of my maid? Mignon is very happy here, and has everything

she wants, and she will continue to have them as long as she is alive."

"Then I see it is not true, and that you intend breaking her heart; and now will you please tell us why?" She looked at him and waited. There was a new ring—one of command—in her voice. I understood now as I listened why it took so short a time for her to rebuild the villa.

"Is madame the girl's guardian that she wishes to know?" asked Lemois. The words came with infinite courtesy, madame being the only woman of whom he stood in awe, but there was an undertone of opposition which, if aggravated, would, I felt sure, end in the old man's abrupt departure from the room.

I tried to relieve the situation by saying how happy not only Mignon but any one of us would be with so brilliant an advocate as madame pleading for our happiness, but she waved me aside with:

"No—please don't. I want dear Lemois to answer. It was one of my reasons for coming to-night, and he must tell me. He is so kind and considerate, and he is always so sorry for anything that suffers. He loves flowers and birds and animals, and music and pictures and

all beautiful things, and yet he is worse than one of the cannibals that Monsieur Herbert tells us about. They eat their young girls and have done with them—Lemois kills his by slow torture—and so I ask you again, dear Lemois—*why?*"

Everybody sat up straight. How would Lemois take it? His fingers began to work, and the corners of his mouth straightened. A sudden flush crossed his habitually pale face. We were sure now of an outbreak: what would happen then none of us dared think.

"Madame la marquise," he began slowly—too slowly for anything but ill-suppressed feeling—"there is no one that I know for whom I have a higher respect; you must yourself have seen that in the many years I have known you. You are a very good and a very noble woman; all your life people have loved you—they still love you. It is one of your many gifts—one you should be thankful for. Some of us do not win this affection. You are, if you will permit me to say it, never lonely nor alone, except by your own choosing. Some of us cannot claim that—I for one. Do you not now understand?" He was still boiling inside, but the patience of the trained landlord and the

innate breeding of the man had triumphed. And then, again, it would be a rash Frenchman of his class who would defy a woman of her exalted rank.

Over her face crept a pleased look—as if she held some trump card up her sleeve—and one of her cooing, bubbling laughs escaped her lips.

"You are not telling me the truth, you dear Lemois. I am not in love with Gaston, the fisherman, nor are you with our pretty Mignon, Neither you nor I have anything to do with it. Here are two young people whose happiness is trembling in the balance. You hold the scales—that is, you claim to, although the girl is neither your child nor your ward and could marry without your consent, and would if she did not love you for yourself and for all you have done for her. Answer me now—do you object because Gaston is a fisherman?"

Whether her knowledge of Lemois' legal rights—and she had stated them correctly—softened him, or whether he saw a loophole for himself, was not apparent, but the answer came with a certain surrender.

"Yes. It is a dangerous life. You have only to live here, as I have done, to count the women who bid their men good-by and watch in the

gray dawn for the boat that never comes back —Mignon's elder brothers in one of them. I do not want her to go through that agony—she is young yet—some one else will come. The first love is not always the last—except in the case of madame"—and he smiled in strange fashion. The bomb was still within reach of his hand, but the fuse had gone out.

"Then it isn't Gaston himself?" she demanded with unflinching gaze.

"No—he is an honest lad; good to his mother; industrious—a brave fellow. He has, too, so I hear, a place in the market—one of the stalls—so he is getting on, and will soon be one of our best citizens." He would talk all night about Gaston, and pleasantly, if she wished.

"Well, if he were a notary? Would that be different?" Her soft brown eyes were hardly visible between their lids, but they were burning with an intense light.

"Yes, it might be." Same air of nonchalance —anything to please the delightful woman.

"Or a chemist?"—just a slit between the lids now, with little flashes along the edges.

"Or a chemist," intoned Lemois.

"Or a head gardener, perhaps?" Both eyes

tight shut under the fluffy gray hair, an intense expression on her face.

"Why not say a minister of state, madame?" laughed Lemois.

"No—no—don't you dare run away like that. Stand to your guns, monsieur. If he were a head gardener, then what?"

Lemois rose from his chair, laid his hand on his shirt-front, and bowed impressively. He was evidently determined to humor her passing whim.

"If he were a head gardener I would not have the slightest objection, madame."

She sprang to her feet and began clapping her plump hands, her laughter filling the room.

"Oh!—I am so happy! You heard what he said—all of you. You, Monsieur Herbert—and you—and you"—pointing to each member of our group. "If he were a head gardener! Oh, was there ever such luck! And do you listen too, you magnificent Lemois! Gaston *is* a head gardener; has been a head gardener for days; every one of the plants you bought for me to-day he will put into the ground with his own hands. His mother will have the stall I bought in the fish market, and he and Mignon are to live in the new garage, and he is to have

charge of the villa grounds, and she is to manage the dairy and the linen and look after the chickens and the ducks. And the wedding is to take place just as soon as you give your consent; and if you don't consent, it will take place anyway, for I am to be godmother and she is to have a dot and all the furniture they want out of what was saved from my house, and that's all there is to it—except that both of them know all about it, for I sent Gaston down here last night with a note for you, and he told Mignon, and it's all settled—now what do you say?"

A shout greeted her last words, and the whole room broke spontaneously into a clapping of hands, Louis, as was his invariable custom whenever excuse offered, on his feet, glass in hand, proposing the health of that most adorable of all women of her own or any other time, past, present, or future—at which the dear, penguin-shaped lady in black velvet and lace raised her dainty white palms in holy horror, protesting that it was Monsieur Lemois whose health must be drunk, as without him nothing could have been done, the clear tones of her voice rising like a bird's song above the others as she sprang forward, grasped Lemois'

hand and lifted him to his feet, the whole room once more applauding.

Yes, it was a great moment! Mignon's happiness was very dear to us, but that which captured us completely was the daring and cleverness of the little woman who had worked for it, and who was so joyous over her success and so childishly enthusiastic at the outcome.

Lemois, unable to stem the flood of rejoicing, seemed to have surrendered and given up the fight, complimenting the marquise upon her diplomacy, and the way in which she had entirely outgeneralled an old fellow who was not up to the wiles of the world. "Such a mean advantage, madame, to take of a poor old man," he continued, bowing low, a curious, unreadable expression crossing his face. "I am, as you know, but clay in your hands, as are all the others who are honored by your acquaintance. But now that I am tied to your chariot wheels, I must of course take part in your triumphal procession; so permit me to make a few suggestions."

The marquise laughed gently, but with a puzzled look in her eyes. She was not sure what he was driving at, but she did not interrupt him.

"We will have an old-time wedding," he con-

tinued gayly, with a comprehensive wave of his hand as if he were arranging the stage setting —"something quite in keeping with the general sentiment; for certain it is that not since the days when fair ladies let themselves down from castle walls into the arms of their plumed knights, only to dash away into space on milk-white steeds, will there be anything quite so romantic as this child-wedding!"

"And so you mean to have a rope ladder, do you, and let my——"

"Oh, no, madame la marquise," he interrupted—"nothing so ordinary! We"—here he began rubbing his hands together quite as if he was ordering a dinner for an epicure—"we will have a revival of all the old customs just as they were in this very place. Our bride will join her lord in a cabriolet, and our groom will come on horseback—all fishermen ride, you know—and so will the other fishermen and maids—each gallant with a fair lady seated behind him on the crupper, her arms about his waist. Then we will have trumpeters and a garter man——"

"A what!" She was still at sea as to his meaning, although she had not missed the tone of irony in his voice.

"A man, madame, whose duty is to secure one of the bride's garters. Oh, you need not start—that is quite simply arranged. The old-time brides always carried an extra pair to save themselves embarrassment. The one for the garter-man will be trimmed with ribbons which he will cut off and distribute to the other would-be brides, who will keep them in their prayer-books."

"Leà, for instance," chimed in Louis, winking at Herbert.

"Leà, for instance, my dear Monsieur Louis. I know of no better mate for a man—and it is a pity you are too young."

The laugh was on Louis this time, but the old man kept straight on, his subtle irony growing more pointed as he continued: "And then, madame, when it is all over and the couple retire for the night—and of course we will give them the best room in our house, they being most distinguished personages—none other than Monsieur Gaston Duprè, Lord of the Lobster Pot, Duke of Buezval, and Grand Marshal of the Deep Sea, and Mademoiselle Mignon, Princess of——"

The marquise drew herself up to her full height. "Stop your nonsense, Lemois. I won't

let you say another word; you shan't ridicule my young people. Stop it, I say!"

"Oh, but wait, madame—please hear me out—I have not finished. These pewter dishes must also come into service"—and he caught up the two bowls from the tops of the great andirons behind him—"these we will fill with spices steeped in mulled wine, which, as I tried to say, we will send to their Royal Highnesses' bedroom—after they are tucked away in——"

"No!—no!—we will do nothing of the kind; everything shall be just the other way. There will be no horses, no cabriolet, no trumpeters, no garters except the ones the dear child will wear, and no mulled wine. We will all go on foot, and the only music will be the organ in the old church, and the breakfast will be here, in our beloved Marmouset, and the punch will be mixed by Monsieur Brierley in the Ming bowl I brought, and Monsieur Louis will serve it, and then they will both go to their own home and sleep in their own bed. So there! Not another word, for it is all settled and finished"—and one of her rippling, joyous laughs—a whole dove-cote mingled with any number of silver bells—quivered through the room.

Lemois joined in the merriment, shrugging

his inscrutable shoulders, repeating that he, of course, was only a captive, and must therefore do as he was bid, a situation which, he added with another low bow, had its good side since so charming a woman as madame held his chain.

And yet despite his gayety there was under it all a certain reserve which, although lost on the others, convinced me that the old man had not, by any means, made up his mind as to what he would do. While Mignon was not his legal ward, his care of her all these years must count for something. Madame, of course, was a difficult person to make war upon once she had set her heart on a thing—and she certainly had on this marriage, amazing as it was to him—and yet there was still the girl's future to be considered, and with it his own. All this was in his eyes as I watched him resuming his place by the fire after some of the excitement had begun to quiet down.

But none of this—even if she, too, had studied him as I had—would have made any impression on Mignon's champion. She was accustomed to being obeyed—the gang of mechanics who had under her directions performed two days' work in one had found that out. And then, again, her whole purpose in life was to

befriend especially those girls who, having no one to stand by them, become broken down by opposition and so marry where their hearts seldom lead. How many had she taken under her wing—how many more would she protect as long as she lived!

Before she bade us good-night all the wedding details were sketched out, our landlord listening and nodding his head whenever appeal was made to him, but committing himself by no further speech. The ceremony, she declared gayly—and it must be the most beautiful and brilliant of ceremonies—would take place in the old twelfth-century church, at the end of the street, from which the great knights of old had sallied forth and where a new knight, one Monsieur Gaston, would follow in their footsteps—not for war, but for love—a much better career—this, with an additional toss of her head at the silent Lemois. There would be flowers and perhaps music—she would see about that—but no trumpeters—and again she looked at Lemois—and everybody from Buezval would be invited—all the fishermen, of course, and their white-capped mothers and sisters and aunts, and cousins for that matter—everybody who would come; and Pierre and her own chef

from Rouen would prepare the wedding breakfast if dear Lemois would consent—and if he didn't consent, it would be cooked anyhow, and brought in ready to be eaten—and in this very room with every one of us present.

"And now, Monsieur Louis, please get me my cloak, and will one of you be good enough to tell my chauffeur I am ready?—and one thing more, and this I insist on: please don't any of you move—and, whatever you do, don't bid me good-by. I want to carry away with me just the picture I am looking at: Monsieur Herbert there in his chair between the two live heads—yes, I believe it now—and Messieurs Louis and Brierley and Le Blanc, and our delightful host, and dear tantalizing Lemois, by the hearth—and the queer figures looking down at us through the smoke of our cigarettes—and the glow of the candles, and the light of the lovely fire to which you have welcomed me. Au revoir, messieurs—you have made me over new and I am very happy, and I thank you all from the bottom of my heart!"

And she was gone.

When the door was shut behind her, Herbert strolled to the fire and stood with his face to

the flickering blaze. We all remained standing, paying unconscious homage to her memory. For some seconds no one spoke. Then, turning and facing the group, Herbert said, half aloud, as if communing with himself:

"A real woman—human and big, half a dozen such would revolutionize France. And she knows—that is the best part of it"—and his voice grew stronger—"she *knows!* You may think you've reached the bottom of things—thought them all out, convinced you are right, even steer your course by your deductions—and here comes along a woman who lifts a lid uncovering a well in your soul you never dreamed of, and your conclusions go sky-high. And she does it so cleverly, and she is so sane about it all. If she were where I could get at her now and then I'd do something worth while. I've made up my mind to one thing, anyhow—I'm going to pull to pieces the thing I set up before I came down here and start something new. I've got another idea in my head—something a little more human."

"Isn't 'The Savage' human, Herbert?" I asked, filling his glass as I spoke, to give him time for reply.

"No; it's only African—one phase of a race.

"How about your 'group,' 'They Have Eyes and They See Not?'" asked Brierley, who had drawn up a chair and stood leaning over its back, gazing into the fire.

"A little better, but not much. The Great Art is along other lines—bigger, higher, stronger—more universal lines, one that has nothing racial about it, one that expresses the human heart no matter what the period or nationality. The 'Prodigal Son' is a drama which has been understood and is still understood by the whole earth irrespective of creed or locality. It appeals to the savage and the savant alike and always will to the end of time. So with the Milo. She is Greek, English, or Slav at your option, but she will live forever because she expresses the divine essence of maternity which is eternal. It is this, and only this, which compels. I have had glimmerings of it all my life. Madame cleared out the cobwebs for me in a flash. A great woman—real human."

Then noticing that no one had either interrupted his outburst or moved his position, he glanced around the group and, as if in doubt as to the way his outburst had been received, said simply:

"Well, speak up; am I right or wrong?

You don't seem to see it as I do. How did she appeal to you, Brierley?"

The young fellow stepped in front of his chair and dropped into its depths.

"You are dead right, Herbert; you are, anyhow, about the Milo. I never go into her presence without lifting my hat, and I have kept it up for years. But you don't do yourself justice, old man. Some of your things will live as long as they hold together. However"—and he laughed knowingly—"that's for posterity to settle. How does madame appeal to me? you ask. Well, being a many-sided woman—no frills, no coquetry, nor sham—she appeals to me more as a comrade than in any other way—just plain comrade. Half the women one meets of her age and class have something of themselves to conceal, giving you a side which they are not, or trying to give it for you to read at first sight. She gave us her worst side first—or what we thought was her worst side—and her best last."

"And you, Le Blanc?" resumed Herbert. "She's your countrywoman; let's have it."

"Oh, I don't know, Herbert. I, of course, have heard of her for years, and she was therefore not so much of a surprise to me as she was

to you all. If, however, you want me to get down to something fundamental, I'll tell you that she confirms a theory I have always had that— But I won't go into that. It's our last night together and we——"

"No; go on. This interests me enormously, especially her personality. We'll have our nightcap later on."

"Well, all right," and he squared himself toward Herbert. "She confirms, as I said, a theory of mine—one I have always had, that the Great Art—that for which the world is waiting—is not so much the creation of statues, if you will pardon me, as the creation of a better understanding of women by men. Not of their personalities, but of their impersonalities. Most women are afraid to let themselves go, not knowing how we will take them, and because of this fear we lose the best part of a woman's nature. She dares not do a great many generous things —sane, kindly, human things—because she is in dread of being misunderstood. She is even afraid to love some of us as intensely as she would. Madame dares everything and could never be misunderstood. All doubts of her were swept out in her opening sentence the night she arrived. She ought to found a school

and teach women to be themselves, then we'd all be that much happier."

"And now, Louis," persisted Herbert, "come, we're waiting. No shirking, and no nonsense. Just the plain truth. How does she appeal to you?"

"As a dead game sport, Herbert, and the best ever! Every man on his feet and I'll give you a toast that is as short and sweet as her adorable self.

"Here's to our friend, Madame la Marquise de la Caux—THE WOMAN."

XV

APPLE-BLOSSOMS AND WHITE MUSLIN

COCO, the snow-white cockatoo, on his perch high up in the roof dormer overlooking the court, is having the time of his life. To see and hear the better, he wobbles back and forth to the end of his wooden peg, steadying himself by his black beak, and then, straightening up, unfurls his yellow celery top of a crest and, with a quick toss of his head, shrieks out his delight.

He wants to know what it is all about, and I don't blame him. No such hurrying and scurrying has been seen in the court-yard below since the morning the players came down from Paris and turned the sixteenth-century quadrangle into a stage-setting for an old-time comedy: new gravel is being raked and sifted over the open space; men on step-ladders are trimming up the vines and setting out plants on top of the kiosks; others are giving last touches to the tulip-beds and the fresh sod along the borders, while two women are scrubbing the chairs and tables under the arbors.

As for the Inn's inhabitants, everybody seems to have lost their wits: Pierre has gone entirely mad. When butter, or eggs, or milk, or a pint of sherry—or something he needs, or thinks he needs—is wanted, he does not wait until his under-chef can bring it from the storage-cave where they are kept—he rushes out himself, grabbing up a basket, or pitcher, or cup as he goes, and comes back on the double-quick to begin again his stirring, chopping, and basting—the roasting-spit turning merrily all the while.

Leà is even more restless. Her activities, however, are confined to clattering along the upstairs corridors, her arms full of freshly ironed clothes—skirts and things—and to the banging of chamber doors—one especially, behind which sits an old fishwoman, yellow as a dried mackerel and as stiff, helping a young girl dress.

The only one who seems to have kept his head is Lemois. His nervousness is none the less in evidence, but he gets rid of his pent-up steam in a different way. He lets the others hustle, while he stands still just inside the gate giving orders to hurrying market boys with baskets of fish; signing receipts for cases

filled with poultry and early vegetables just in by the morning train from Caen; or firing instructions to his gardeners and workmen—self-contained as a ball governor on a horizontal engine and seemingly as inert, yet an index of both pressure and speed.

All this time Coco keeps up his hullabaloo, nobody paying the slightest attention. Suddenly there comes an answering cry and the cockatoo snaps his beak tight with a click and listens intently, his head on one side. It is the shriek of a siren—a long-drawn, agonizing wail that strikes the bird dumb with envy. Nearer it comes — nearer — now at the turn of the street; now just outside the gate, and in whirls Herbert's motor, the painter beside him.

"Ah!—Lemois—the top of the morning to you and yours!" Louis' stentorian voice rings out. "Never saw a better one come out of the skies. Out with you, Herbert. Are we the first to arrive? Here, give me that basket of grapes and box of bonbons. A magnificent run, Lemois. Left Paris at five o'clock, while the milk was going its rounds; spun through Lisieux before they were wide awake; struck the coast, and since then nothing but apple-bloom—one

great pink-and-white bedquilt up hill and down dale. Glorious! I want a whole tree, full of blossoms, remember—just as I wrote you—none of your mean little chopped-off twigs, but a cart-load of branches. Let me have that old apple-tree out in the lot in front—the apples were never any good, and Mignon may as well have the blossoms as those thieving boys. Did you send word to the school children? Yes, of course you did. Oh, I tell you, Herbert, we are going to have a bully time—Paul and Virginia are not in it. Hello! Leà, you up there, you blessed old carved root of a virgin!—where's the adorable Mignon?"

"Good-morning, Monsieur Louis—and you too, Monsieur Herbert," came her voice in reply from the rail of the gallery above our heads. "Mignon is inside," and she pointed to the closed door behind her. "Gaston's mother is helping her. Madame la marquise will be here any minute, and so will Monsieur Le Blanc and everybody from Buezval. Oh!—you should see my child! You wouldn't know her in the pretty clothes madame has sent."

And now while Herbert is digging out from under the motor seats various packages tied with white ribbons, including the drawing he

made of Leà, now richly framed, and which with the aid of the old woman he carried up the crooked stairway and deposited at a certain door, I will tell you what all this excitement is about.

Madame la marquise has had her way. Not an instantaneous and complete victory. There had been parleyings, of course, after that eventful night some months before when she had outgeneralled and then defied Lemois, and concessions had been made, both sides yielding a little; but before we separated for our homes we felt sure that the old man either had or would surrender.

"Well, let it be as you will," he had said with a sigh; "but not now. In the spring when the apple-blossoms are in bloom—and then perhaps you may come back."

To me, however, who had stayed on for a few days, he had, late one afternoon, poured out his whole heart. The twilight had begun to settle in the Marmouset, and the last glow of the western sky creeping through the stained-glass windows was falling upon the old Spanish leather and gold crowned saints and figures, warming them into rich harmonies, when I had stolen inside the wonderful room to take one

of my last looks—an old habit of mine in a place I love. There I found him hunched up in Herbert's chair at one corner of the fireplace, his head on his hand.

"Well, you have won your fight," he had said in a low, measured voice, speaking into the bare chimney, his fingers still supporting his forehead. "You will take my child from me and leave me alone."

"But she will be much happier," I now ventured.

"Perhaps so—I cannot tell. I have seen many a bright sunrise end in a storm. But none of you have understood me. You thought it was money, and what the man could bring her, and that I objected because the boy was poor and a fisherman. What am I but a man of the people?—what is she but a peasant?—and her mother and grandmother before her. Who are we that we should try to rise above our station, making ourselves a laughing-stock? Had he been a land-owner with a thousand head of cattle it would have been the same with me. Nothing will be as it was any more. I am an old man and she is all the child I have. When she was eight years old she would come into this very room and nestle close in my lap,

and I would talk to her by the hour—she and I alone, the fire lighting up the dark. And so it was when she grew up. It is only of late that she has shut herself away from me. I deserve it maybe—she must marry somebody, and I would not have it otherwise—but why must it be now? I do not blame madame la marquise. She is an enthusiastic woman whose heart often runs away with her head; but she is honest and sincere. She had only the child's happiness in view, and she will be a mother to them both as long as she lives, as she is to many others I know."

He had paused for a moment, I standing still beside him, and had then gone on, the words coming slowly, like the dropping of water:

"You remember Monsieur Herbert's story, do you not, of the old mould-maker who lost his daughter, and who died in his chair, his clay masks grinning down at him from the skylight above? Well, I am he. Just as they grinned at the old mould-maker, his daughter gone, so in my loneliness will my figures grin at me."

This had been in late October.

What the dull winter had been to him I never knew, but he had not gone back on his

word, and now that the apple-blossoms were in bloom, and the orchards a blaze of glory, the wedding day, just as he had promised, had arrived!

No wonder, then, Coco is screaming at the top of his voice; no wonder the court-yard is swept by a whirlwind of flying feet; no wonder the upstairs chamber door, with Leà as guardian angel, is opened and shut every few minutes, hiding the girl behind it; and no wonder that Herbert's impatient car, every spoke in its wheels trembling with excitement, is puffing with eagerness to make the run to the old apple-tree in the outer lot, and so on to the church, loaded to its extra tires with a carpet of blossoms for Mignon's pretty feet.

No wonder, either, that before Herbert's car, with Louis in charge of the blossom raid, had cleared the back gate, there had puffed in another motor—two this time—Le Blanc in one, with his friend, The Architect, beside him, the seats packed full of children, their faces scrubbed to a phenomenal cleanliness, their hair skewered with gay ribbons, all their best clothes on their backs; madame la marquise and Marc in the other, an old weather-beaten fisherman—an uncle of Gaston's, too lame to

walk—beside her, and bundled up on the back seat two lean withered fishwomen in black bombazine and close-fitting white caps—a cousin and an aunt of the groom—the first time any one of the three had ever stepped foot in a car.

As madame and her strange crew entered the court, I turned instinctively to Lemois, wondering how he would deport himself when the crucial moment arrived—and a car-load of relatives certainly seemed to express that fatality—but he was equal to the occasion.

"Ah, madame!" he said in his courtliest manner, his hand over his heart, "who else in the wide world would have thought of so kindly an act? These poor people will bless you to their dying day. And it is delightful to see you again, Monsieur Marc. You have, I know, come to help madame in her good works. As I have so often told her, she is——"

"And why should I not give them pleasure, you dear Lemois? See how happy they are. And this is not half of them! No, don't get out, mère Francine—you are all to keep on to the church and get into your seats before the village people crowd it full; and you, Auguste"—this to her chauffeur—"are to go back to Buez-

val for the others—they are all waiting." Here she espied Herbert on a ladder tacking some blossoms over the doorway. "Ah!—monsieur, aren't you very happy it has turned out so well? I caught only a glimpse of you as you dashed past a few minutes ago or I should have held you up and made you bring the balance of the old fishwomen. They are all crazy to come. Ah! but you needn't to have come down. It is so good to see you again," and she shook his hand heartily. "But what a morning for a wedding! Did you notice as you came along the shore road the little puff clouds skipping out to sea for very joy and hear the birds splitting their throats in song? Even my own head is getting turned with all this billing and cooing, and I warn all of you right here"—and she swept her glance over the men gathered about her, her eyes twinkling in merriment—"that you must be very careful to keep out of my way or the first thing you know one of you will be whisked off to the altar and married before you know it. And now I am going upstairs to see how my little bride gets on, if Monsieur Marc will be good enough to carry my heavy wraps inside."

She turned, stopped for an instant attracted

by something she saw through the archway of the court, and burst into a peal of ringing laughter.

"Oh!—come here quick, every one of you, and see what's driving in! It's Monsieur Brierley in the dearest of donkey carts. Where did you get that absurd little beast?"

"Whoa! Victor Hugo!" shouted Brierley, springing from the cart (both together wouldn't have covered the space occupied by an upright piano). "I found him last fall, my dear madame la marquise, in a stable in Caen, kicking out the partitions, and brought him home to my Abandoned Farm by the Marsh to add a touch of hilarity to my surroundings. He wakes me every morning with his hind feet against the door of his stable and is a most engaging and delightful companion. Hello! Lemois, and—you here, Herbert! Shake!—awful glad to see you. Where's Louis?—gone for blossoms?—just like him. I tried to get here earlier, to help you all, but Victor Hugo is peculiar and considerably set in his ways, and if I had tried to overpersuade him he might still be a mile down the road with his feet anchored in the mud.

"Take a look inside my cart, will you, Her-

bert? My contribution to start the young couple housekeeping"—and he pulled off a covering of clean straw—"six dozen eggs, a pair of mallards—shot them yesterday, and about the last of them this season, and no business to shoot even these—a basket of potatoes, a dozen of pear jam—in family jars—and a small keg of apple-jack—the two last, the sweet and the strong, to be eaten and drank together to keep peace in the house. No, don't take Hugo out of the shafts, Lemois, and don't say anything about its being meal-time, not loud enough for him to hear. When the fun is over I'm going to drive him down to madame's garage and pack the housekeeping stuff away in Mignon's cupboard."

Long before noon the court-yard, as well as the archway and the kiosks and arbors, had begun to fill up, the news of the extraordinary proceedings having brought everybody ahead of time. There was the mayor, wearing his tricolor sash and insignia of office, and with him his stout, double-chinned wife in black silk and white gloves—bareheaded, except for a gold ornament that looked like a bunch of twisted hair-pins; there were the apothecary and the notary and the man who sold pottery, not for-

getting the bustling, outspoken fat doctor who had sewed up Gaston's head the time madame's villa went sliddering toward the sea—or tried to—as well as all the great and small folk of the village who claimed the least little bit of acquaintance with any one connected with the function from Lemois down.

Why the distinguished Madame la Marquise de la Caux—to say nothing of Lemois and the equally distinguished sculptors, painters, and authors, some of whom were well known to them by reputation—should make all this fuss about a simple little serving-maid who had brought them their coffee—a waif, really, picked from between the cobbles—one like a dozen others the village over, except for her beauty—was a question no one of them had been able to answer. Was it a whim of the great lady?—for it was well known she had made the match—or was there something else behind it all? (a mystery, by the way, which they are still trying to solve; disinterested kindness being the most incomprehensible thing in the world to some people). The notary was particularly outspoken in his opinion. He even criticised the great woman herself from behind his hand to the apothecary, whose upper room

he occupied. "Been much better if these people of high degree had stayed at home and let the two young people enjoy themselves in their own way. Great mistake mixing the classes." But, then, the notary is the mouth-piece of the revolutionary party in the village and hates the aristocracy as a singed cat does the fire.

Soon there came a shout from the gallery over our heads, and we all looked up. Leà, her wrinkled face aglow with that same inner light, the rays struggling through her rusty skin, craned her head over the rail. Then came Mignon, madame close behind, pushing her veil aside so we could all see her face—the girl blushing scarlet, but too happy to do more than laugh and bow and make little dumb nods with her head, hiding her face as best she could behind Leà's angular shoulders.

"Yes, we are all ready, and are coming down the back stairs, and will meet you at the gate," cried madame when she had released the girl —"and it's time to start."

Mignon's passage along the corridor, followed by madame and Leà and Gaston's old mother, roused a murmur of welcome which swelled into an outburst of joyous enthusiasm as her feet touched the level of the court, and

continued until she had joined Gaston and the others already formed in line for the march to the church.

And a wonderful procession it was!

First, of course, came the mayor—his worthy spouse on his left. "The State before the Church," madame la marquise remarked with a sly twinkle, "and quite as it should be," rabid anti-clerical as she was.

Close behind stepped Lemois in a frock-coat buttoned to his chin, his grave, thoughtful face framed in a high collar and black cravat—like an old diplomat at a court function—Mignon on his arm: Such a pretty, shrinking, timid Mignon, her lashes lifting and settling as if afraid to raise her eyes lest some one should find a chink through which they could peep into her heart.

Next came Louis escorting dear old Leà!

There was a picture for you! Had she been a duchess the rollicking young painter could not have treated her with more deference, bearing himself aloft, his chest out, handing her over the low "thank-ye-marm" at the street corner—the old woman, straight as her bent shoulders would allow, calm, self-contained, but near bursting with a joy that would drown her in

tears if she gave way but an instant—and all with a quiet dignity that somehow, when you looked at her, sent a lump to your throat.

And then madame and Gaston!—she stepping free and alive, her little feet darting in and out below her rich, short gown, her eyes dancing; he swinging along beside her with that quick, alert step of the young who have always stretched their muscles to the utmost, his sunburnt skin twice as dark from the mad rush of blood through his veins; abashed at the great honor thrust upon him, and yet with that certain poise and independence common to men who have fought and won and can fight and win again.

And last—amused, glad to lend a hand, enjoying it all to the full—Herbert, and Gaston's poor old broken-down-with-hard-work mother—stiff, formal, scared out of her seven wits—trying to smile as she ambled along, her mouth dry, her knees shaking—the rest of us bringing up the rear—Brierley, Le Blanc, The Architect, Marc, and I walking together.

But the greatest sight was at the church—it was but a short step,—the mayor, as he reached it, bowing right and left to the throng, the sacristan pushing his way through the

First, of course, came the mayor—his worthy spouse on his left

school children massed in two rows on either side of the flower-strewn path, their hands filled with Louis' blossoms; back of these the rest of the villagers—those who wanted to see the procession, and crowding the doorway and well inside the aisles, every soul who could claim admission for miles around. And then as we passed under the old portal—through which, so the legend runs, strode the Great Warrior surrounded by his knights (not a word of which do I believe)—the small organ with a spasmodic jerk wheezed out a welcome that went on increasing in volume until we had moved beneath the groined arches and reached the altar. There we grouped ourselves in a half-circle while the vows were pledged and the small gold ring was slipped on Mignon's finger and Gaston had kissed Mignon; and Mignon had kissed her new mother; and madame la marquise had taken both their hands in her own and said how happy she was, and how she wished them all the joy in the world. And then—and this was the crowning joy of the ceremony—then, like the old cavalier he is, and can be when occasion demands, Lemois stepped up and shook Gaston's hand, Mignon looking at the old man with hungry, loving eyes until,

unable to restrain herself the longer, she threw her arms around his neck and burst into tears—and so, with another wheeze of the organ, way was made and the homeward march began.

It was high noon now—the warm spring sun in both their faces—Mignon on Gaston's arm. And a fine and wholesome pair they made—good to look upon, and all as it should and would oftener be if meddlesome cooks could keep their fingers out of the social broth: she in her pretty white muslin frock and veil, her head up, her eyes shining clear—she didn't care now who saw; Gaston in his country-cut clothes (his muscles would stretch them into lines of beauty before the week was out), his new straw hat with its gay ribbon half shading his fine, strong young face; his eyes drinking in everything about him—too supremely happy to do more than walk and breathe and look.

Everything was ready for them at the Marmouset. Lemois had not been a willing ally, but having once sworn allegiance he had gone over heart and soul. The young people and their friends—as well as his own—including the exalted lady and her band of conspirators, should want for nothing at his hands.

Louis and Leà, as well as madame la mar-

quise, were already inside the Marmouset when the bride and groom arrived. More apple-blossoms here—banks and festoons of them; the deep, winter-smoked fireplace stuffed full; loops, bunches, and spirals hanging from the rafters, the table a mass of ivory and pink, the white cloth with its dishes and viands shining through.

Mignon's lip quivered as she passed the threshold, and all her old-time shyness returned. This was not her place! How could she sit down and be waited upon—she who had served all her life? But madame would have none of it.

"To-morrow, my child, you can do as you choose; to-day you do as *I* choose. You are not Mignon—you are the dear sweet bride whom we all want to honor. Besides, love has made you a princess, or Monsieur Herbert would not insist on your sitting in his own chair, which has only held the nobility and persons of high degree, and which he has wreathed in blossoms. And you will sit at the head of the table too, with Gaston right next to you."

As grown-ups often devote themselves to amusing children—playing blind-man's-buff, puss-in-the-corner, and Santa Claus—so did

Herbert and Louis, Le Blanc, Brierley, The Architect, madame, and the others lay themselves out to entertain these simple people. Leà and Mignon, knowing the ways of gentlefolk, soon forgot their shyness, as did Gaston, and entered into the spirit of the frolic without question—but the stiff old mother, and the lame uncle, and the aunts and cousins were sore distressed, refusing more than a mouthful of food, their furtive glances wandering over the queer figures and quaint objects of the Marmouset—more marvellous than anything their eyes had ever rested on. One by one, with this and that excuse, they stole away and stood outside, their wondering eyes taking in the now quiet and satisfied Coco and the appointments of the court-yard.

Soon only our own party and Leà and the bride and groom were left, Lemois still the gracious host; madame pitching the key of the merriment, Louis joining in—on his feet one minute, proposing the health of the newly married couple; his glass filled from the contents of the rare punch-bowl entwined with blossoms, which madame had given the coterie the autumn before; paying profound and florid compliments the while to madame la marquise;

the next, poking fun at Herbert and Le Blanc; having a glass of wine with Lemois and another with Gaston, who stood up while he drank in his effort to play the double rôle of servant and guest, and finally, shouting out that as this was to be the last time any one would ever get a decent cup of coffee at the Inn, owing to the cutting off in the prime of life of the high priestess of the roaster—once known as the adorable Mademoiselle Mignon—that Madame Gaston Duprè should take Lemois' place at the small table. "And may I have the distinguished pleasure, madame"—at which the bride blushed scarlet, and meekly did as she was bid, everybody clapping their hands, including Lemois.

And it was in truth a pretty sight, one never to be forgotten: Gaston devouring her with his eyes, and the fresh young girl spreading out her white muslin frock as she settled into the chair which Louis had drawn up for her, moving closer the silver coffee-pot with her small white hands—and they were really very small and very pretty—dropping the sugar she had cracked herself into each cup—"One for you, is it, madame?"—and "Monsieur Herbert, did you say two?"—and all with a gentle, uncon-

scious grace and girlish modesty that won our hearts anew.

The snort and chug of Le Blanc's car, pushed close to the door, broke up the picture and scattered the party. Le Blanc would drive the bridal pair home himself—Gaston's mother and her relations having already been whisked away in madame's motor, with Marc beside the chauffeur to see them safely stowed inside their respective cabins.

But it was when the bride stepped into the car at the gate—or rather before she stepped into it—that the real choke came in our throats. Lemois had followed her out, standing apart, while Leà hugged and kissed her and the others had shaken her hands and said their say; Louis standing ready to throw Brierley's two big hunting-boots after the couple instead of the time-honored slipper; Herbert holding the blossoms and the others huge handfuls of rice burglarized openly from Pierre's kitchen.

All this time Mignon had said nothing to Lemois, nor had she looked his way. Then at last she turned, gazing wistfully at him, but he made no move. Only when her slipper touched the foot-board did he stir, coming slowly forward and looking into her eyes.

"You have been a good girl, Mignon," he said calmly.

She thanked him shyly and waited. Suddenly he bent down, took her cheeks between his hands, kissed her tenderly on the forehead, and with bowed head walked back into the Marmouset alone.

END.